



## Adrift

I knew that I shouldn't have sunk that last ball.

It had just started as what I had thought was a friendly game of pool. Now I was backed into a corner by a skinny psycho Billy Bob with beer breath who was seconds away from beating the living shit of me with a pool cue.

I should have guessed that the evening might come to this when I saw that this guy's concept of suave was holding his smoke in the space where he was missing a front tooth.

"Yew New York Jew boys think yer so damn slick, don't'cha?" He was leaning so close to me that he was spitting on my glasses when he spoke. "Comin' on down here t'smoke that ell-ess-dee with ma sister so's ya knock her up an' go on home t'brag to yer Jew buddies about it, huh?"

I sensed that there was no right answer to his question, so I tried to change the subject. "Actually," I

ventured, "you don't smoke LSD, its usually soaked into a little....." The half drunk redneck jabbed me hard in the solar plexus with the fat end of the cue, effectively shutting me up.

Joe jumped up from the bar with an alarmed expression. Another one of the trio of country boys called to him. "Ya better just sit back on down, hippie boy, or we'all might jus' have to be givin' you a haircut!" He guffawed at his own sparkling wit. Joe stayed put. He gave me a look that said it all. He had warned me not to accept when the three had invited me to play.

As I leaned against the wall wheezing, my brain was racing. I was telling myself that there would be no shame in running out on this confrontation. If anyone asked me, I always characterized this sort of thing as a "commitment to nonviolence", but more accurately speaking I was a lover, not a fighter, having neither the physical conditioning nor the temperament to attempt to hold my own against three beer brained bubbas.

"Look, guys", I said in a slightly squeaky voice from my spazzing diaphragm, "you got me all wrong. I just came in to drink a little beer and shoot a little pool. Maybe it was a bad idea. Why don't

you just let me and my friend go our way...."

The redneck stuck his face real close and said, "Why'n't yew shet

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up!" Another poke in the gut with the cue and I was on the floor.

None of the locals looking on seemed to be anything more than slightly amused, most seemed bored, no one stepped forward to help.

When this sort of thing happened, I always went into a special survival mode. That means do what ever is necessary to survive. If that means a little humiliation, well then so be it.

"O.K.", I thought, "so far these guys are talking beatings and haircuts, and we might still be able to talk our way out of this."

The one with the beer gut and the "CAT" tractor hat grabbed Joe by the arm and hauled him over by me. "Mebby we ought to see if these hippie boys really are queer!"

"Aw, shit." I thought.

"Agin?" said the guy with the cue in a slightly disgusted voice, "Damn Jimmy, why yew always gotta do that stuff? I swear you aint right."

The one called Jimmy got real red in the face. "Ah aint no queer Billy! Ah want t'see if they got more'n jes' hair like a girl. Bet they do th'back door on each other all th'time."

The skinny one looked down at me. "Thet true? Yew boys 'back door buddies'?"

I couldn't help it, I started to panic, this was serious. Me and Joe were about to get butt fucked by these

inbred goons.

"Come on guys", I said, "Just let us get out of here, we don't want any trouble. Come on, just let us go."

The guy looked at me like I had crawled out from under a rock.

"Yew aint much of a man, are yew." He sneered. "Well....I sure don't need to see what Jimmy does again."

Finally, they let me and Joe crawl out of the bar on our hands and knees. They drove past us in a beat up pick up truck a half hour later as we walked along the roadside and threw beer bottles at us. That was the last we saw of them.

"So what was the name of that place?", I asked, "*Humdinger*?"

"Hutsanger." Said Joe, "Hutsanger, West Virginia. May I never pass that way again."

Joe was congratulating us on having gotten out of that one.

"Yeah", I said, "then why do I feel like such a *nebbish* ?"

"Will ya stop with the Yiddish already?!?" Said Joe. "That's how you get us into trouble in this part of the country!"

"Damn." I said, "Good thing we're not Negroes!"

"It's 'Black' , shit-for-brains, and we might as well be so far as folks around here are concerned."

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I hunched my shoulders and lit a smoke.

He was right enough. Joe was clean shaven, but I had a full bushy beard. We both had shoulder length hair, mine brown and frizzy, sticking out like the cap of a big mushroom, his blonde and straight and I was wearing multiply patched bell-bottom Levi's. As well I had my right ear pierced four times with gold rings through and Joe had a big pot leaf embroidered on his Levi's jacket. I suppose we might as well have had signs that said 'kick me' stuck on our backs.

We were behind schedule to meet up with our friends in Birmingham. The party at Paul's place had actually already started last night. We had called this morning to let them know we were going to be late, but I was impatient. Joanie was already there.

Me and Joanie had gotten together a week ago and I was eager to repeat the experience. She was so very sweet. Beautiful long wavy chestnut hair, eyes like the deep blue sea, a smile to reach into your very soul, amazing, I mean ***amazing*** tits. She was deep too, she knew how to heal with crystals and massage and she like, *radiated* total love. She grew the best pot by *talking* to the plants. I really wanted to, *needed* to, see her again. More importantly, I needed to get there before someone more charming than me got close to her. Joanie was a firm believer in free love. So was I, as long as it was free love with me. Fact was, she was the first woman that I had had an interest in having a steady relationship with in a long time. It was

easy enough to find a woman to spend a few pleasant hours with, but Joanie was of a higher quality and I wanted it to continue.

It was almost daylight when we finally got back to the highway. We had left our sign behind in the bar. We were lucky to have gotten out with our packs.

We faced the oncoming stream of vehicles with our thumbs out and our best "certified harmless" smiles on our faces.

Besides a statie pulling over to tell us we had to stay on the entrance ramp, we had to wait for almost an hour before anyone stopped. It was a tractor without a load that finally pulled over. One of the nice ones with a sleeper in back.

The guy at the wheel looked a little crazed, but there was nothing unusual about that. Lots of these truckers would drive straight through for twenty four hours regularly. Very often the drivers would have really great grass and speed which they were always generous with. I could understand that, its easier to talk to someone who is as wasted as you are.

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He would at least get us to Tennessee, he was heading home and he lived just outside of Nashville.

I sat up front with the driver smoking his pot and talking about science fiction while Joe sat back in the sleeper and strummed the driver's fancy Ovation guitar.

"When we get to know the other alien civilizations, it's all going to be one big mind." I said, "Like, it will be a *cosmic* joining of all sentient life of the Universe." I was off full steam on my Olaf Stapledon rap. "Its the only way that we can make a mind big enough to understand God." I had recently read "Starmaker" and it had become my religion of the moment. "Ya'see, this creative force has made a succession of universes, man, and each one has gotten closer and closer to comprehending it. Its not even going to be our universe which breaks through, at least not on a really meaningful level. We gotta get to a level where its all *vibrations*, man."

The trucker was just letting me go with it, but I don't think it was because he was particularly impressed with the intellectual content of what I was saying. He was sort of nodding and commenting as if he were enjoying a jazz horn solo. He never added anything except for "Uh-huh" or "I see" and continued to suck thoughtfully on the joint whenever it came his way.

"Hey", he said, "you guys ever try any 'Thai Stick'?"

He then pulled out some of the most powerful marijuana I had ever had. We were already stoned, but this stuff really had a sort of powerfully psychedelic quality.

The guy finally had to drop us off at route 65 near Woodbine.

We were at a strip mall in a strange place with a serious case of munchies. The supermarket was full of brightly colored packages of food in brands we had never heard of. We were trying hard not to look stoned which was difficult because just about everything was, like, *amazingly* hilarious.

We finally settled on a loaf of bread and some baloney with a great smiling cartoon farmer pig logo. We also picked up some mustard which looked like yellow paint and some "Johnny Boy" brand cherry soda. I bought myself a carton of Chesterfields.

We sat on the curb in the parking lot and made sandwiches in the sun. while we were stuffing our faces a little black girl with a serious look on her face and a finger jammed up her nose toddled up to us.

"Waffo yew gwine'abe habin' yo foo atcheerfo?" It was no known human language. I laughed and spit my soda. Joe smacked me in the head.

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"What's that?" I asked.

"Waffo yew gots dat hayuh? Y'all s'kina bums?"

I got just plain scared. This dope was so strong that I had forgotten the English language.

The kid was filthy in the way only a kid could be. She had chocolate smeared around her lips in an whole other shade of brown from her skin. There were spots of God-knows-what all over her white lace trimmed blue "Little Lulu" dress. One of her grimy socks had fallen down and she was clutching an abused looking plastic baby doll. We were saved from having to think of an appropriate response by the kid's mother, one of the fattest human beings I had ever seen, grabbing her by the arm and leading her away while scolding her in the same gibberish that the child had used.

I think it was about ninety degrees, we were in a surreal place and the "Johnny Boy" was making me feel sticky.

"Joe, let's get back on the road."

Joe and I peeled our asses off of the curb and headed back to the highway. On the way , we stopped by the market's dumpster to pull out a piece of a "MO-BO" brand eggplant box and scrawl "BIRMINGHAM" on the blank side in red Magic Marker.

We were on the shoulder for only a few minutes when a rundown but brightly painted VW Minibus pulled up. Emblazoned across the side was a painting of a pipe smoking lizard. From the window oozed the sound of the Grateful Dead, a concert tape, not an album. This looked promising.

The little van was actually kind of crowded inside There were two guys up front who were more or less our counterparts with thick southern accents. They were named Bud and Frank and they had been coming back from an overnight hunting trip. They lived on a small rural commune. About ten permanent residents with lots of folks passing through all the time. They made it sound like they had a pretty nice life. Unfortunately, they were only going about twenty miles down the road, but they seemed like good people. They had a gallon jug of cheap red wine which was passed around to the enjoyment of all.

The van was their home away from home which was arranged with tight efficiency. The rear seats had been pulled out and the rear side windows boarded over. On one of these walls was a rack which held a

shotgun and some fishing poles. Hanging from a hook was a small dayglow-pink Plexiglas bong. Against the rear door was a box of shells, a tackle box and an aluminum cooler which

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contained several dead rabbits.

They explained that they had been sent by their friends to fetch dinner, and invited us to come and join them. We regretfully declined, but invited them to come on down to Paul's. They said they might in a day or so, but they had to take care of family business first.

There was something really compelling about that lifestyle and yet I knew that I would get tired of the "gotta milk the cows and chickens" stuff pretty damn quick. But they were living the ideal or at least what I held as the ideal at the time.

We were left where they turned off onto a dirt road which was right next to a little weed choked pond. There were more mosquitoes than the population of China and they all flocked around us. We decided to walk a ways down the road to the highway entrance before we stood up with the sign.

We stood for two hours in the very hot sun until it clouded over a little bringing some relief, but now the afternoon was wearing on and no ride was in sight. We wanted to make Birmingham tonight and it was still over a hundred miles south.

We were finally rescued from that spot by a guy in a pick up truck who threw us in the bed with a bunch of tools. It was actually pretty uncomfortable, but he got us fifty miles closer to our destination. He never said more than three words to us except to ask us where we were going when he picked us up and to wish us luck when he dropped us off. Without a word of explanation, he gave us each a little copy of the New Testament before he drove off.

The next car we saw was an Alabama State policeman.

State cops come in a few types.

The first type, the most common, is the guy who is mostly concerned with having his job be as easy as possible. They are not all that nuts about hitch-hikers because they are an alien presence on their highway and if an unlucky one gets killed, it stirs up all kinds of trouble. These types will generally insist you get off the main road and stay by the entrance ramp or give you a ride to a truck stop where you could ask around for a ride. These cops always refer to the hitch-hikers as "you guys", "buddy" or even "sonny".

The second type never directly addressed hitch-hikers at all save to issue orders to present ID and then leave the road. I have had a couple of this type take me to the state line if its nearby and order

me to stay off the state highway system. This type is always pissed

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off that you are in their lives, have no concern that you are a person who has to get somewhere, but they don't view you enough as a human being to take it personally.

The third type is the one who calls you "sir". The extra politeness is the manifestation of a powerfully officious attitude. They are what I call the "Barney Fife" type. For these guys, the badge is a license to do any damn thing they please. For them, any violation of local law, no matter how minor, is a major threat to the foundations of civilization.

We got one of these.

He pulled up directly in front of us bringing the car to a halt less than a yard from our toes. As he stepped from the car we saw that he was tall and muscular with a square jaw. Most of his face was obscured by the shadow from his broad brimmed "smokey" hat. His eyes were hidden behind aviator style mirror shades.

"Good afternoon *gentlemen*", he said with emphasis, "I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you the state of Alabama."

Now, I had been down this way before, but Joe hadn't so he didn't know how to act. He didn't know that it wasn't his turn to talk until the cop asked a question, so he didn't even think twice about saying, "Why, thank you officer."

The cop froze with a sour curl to his lip which then metamorphosed into a wry and slightly malicious smile. He looked directly at Joe. "Do I detect, *sir*, that you find something amusing about our tradition of southern hospitality?"

Joe immediately realized that he had made a mistake. Trying to make the best of it he answered, "No officer, its one of the things I truly enjoy about visiting this part of the country!"

The statie pulled himself up to his full height. "And yet, *sir*, you repay that hospitality by violating our laws against pedestrians on the public highways and the begging of rides. Or was that sign an act of charity on your part to show others the way to Birmingham?"

We both looked uncomfortable. "Well?", asked the trooper, "Was it?"

I spoke up. "No sir. We were hitching rides."

"I had no doubt of that, *sir*." He rested his hand casually but meaningfully on his sidearm. "Gentlemen", he chirped, "I will need to see some identification and with your permission, I would like to examine the contents of your back packs. You *may*, of course,

refuse that permission if you so desire."

Joe and I were both well aware that refusal would almost

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certainly result in our being hauled in.

He minutely examined our licenses. "Mister Joseph Robert Clanton of St. Louis, Missouri and Mister Adam Allen Rosenfeld of Larchmont, New York. I expect, Mister *Rosenfeld*, that you must have at least *one* good attorney in your family." He smiled broadly. I idly wondered if he was in the Klan. It hardly

mattered. Whether his bigotry was a personal matter or part of an organized movement made little difference to me at this moment. The results could be the same. Long ago, it had stopped surprising me what a stigma being Jewish and from New York was down south. The New York Jew was like the equivalent of the boogie man. In spite of any evidence to the contrary, we were here to throw money around, insult local traditions and be "pushy".

He neatly laid out the contents of first one then the other of our packs on the hood of the cruiser. He was clearly hoping to find pot or acid, but didn't. I actually had about six blotters rolled up in a baggie inside my pack frame. Ninety-nine percent of cops aren't clever enough to look there, so I wasn't even worried about that. Even if he were to put us in the lock up, I was confident that my stash would still be there when they returned our stuff.

He did comment on my twelve pack of Trojans. "Looks like you're planning a big time in Birmingham, *sir*! I hope you understand that folks there aren't going to take kindly to having their daughters defiled."

"Officer, I have a girlfriend. She's from New Jersey." I don't think that Joanie actually thought of herself as my "girlfriend", but he didn't know that.

"I only hope she's over eighteen, *sir*."

*Oy gevalt*. This guy felt perfectly free to comment on every aspect of our lives, knowing full well that he had us totally in his power.

He wasted forty-five minutes of our time before telling us that we had better not be there when he came by an hour from now. He didn't try to fine us, arrest us or even directly order us to leave the roadway. We had just been a diversion for him. A bit of entertainment. As he left us we were filled with impotent anger.

It was good luck that someone stopped almost as soon as the statie finally left us alone.

It was a gleaming white Cadillac with a guy in a polyester suit and a bad rug at the wheel. To our joy, he was going all the way to

Birmingham.

His name was Todd and he sold food service refrigeration

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equipment. He smelled of cigars and hair tonic. On the middle finger of his right hand was an ugly chunky gold ring with a big diamond in it.

"You boys got it all wrong", he drawled, "you gotta look sharp in this world. People don't respect you if you don't have a nice car and a sharp suit. In the long run, no one's gonna care how you felt about Dick Nixon or Viet Nam. They just want t'know how much money you make."

Joe and I were, of course, morally incensed by this philosophy. The shallow "suit and tie" lifestyle was what our life was, in our view, was the opposite of. When a character like this came along, it was our turn to feel superior.



Todd continued his soliloquy. "If you're in sales, you got to, I'm tellin' you boys, must drive a Caddy. None of them foreign cars. No Rolls Royce. No *Mercedes Benz*. You want an American car, a big expensive one. It says a lot about a man, lets people know you're a success and lets 'em know that they will be a success if they do business with you. You buy American because that lets 'em know that you have confidence in America."

It was like he lived in a different America from the one we did. The Amerika we saw was an Amerika of the Vietnam war and the Ku Klux Klan. It was an Amerika of runaway profit, pollution and greed. Our parent's definition of success was in fact the enemy in our Amerika.

"Lemme tell you boys something." He lowered his voice as he prepared to reveal a confidence. "I got me a gal in every town around here as well as a wife and kids in Nashville, and I can get nice things for all of 'em. I don't have to work too hard so I got time to get some honey from all of them."

He was like a preacher thumping the Bible of the American dream.

"Oh yeah", he continued, "I know you long hair boys can get the girls now, but time comes for all women that they want to know what you can give 'em. If you want to keep gettin' the good stuff you better have a good job and that's God's own truth. Y'all ought t'fergit about them hippie girls. A woman like that won't get you no where. The woman you want behind you should look good, cook good, be happy with what you give her and keep her mouth shut. You can't put up with none of that 'women's lib' crap, at least a *real* man won't."

Now generally, I assumed that the women I knew would prefer to take care of themselves, but none of them were here and this guy's

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rap had gotten under my skin.

"The women I know aren't like that." I said. "They care about their independence. They aren't looking to a man for a meal ticket. *They* care about love." In my defense... I *really* believed what I was saying here.

Todd snorted. "*Sure* they do."

He dropped us off right at the road that led up to Paul's place. He gave us each a fifty dollar bill and told us to buy a suit with it. It was the exclamation point on his missionary rap, saying "I can afford to toss a hundred bucks at a couple of raggy-ass hippies just to make a point" more eloquently than words. It was a gross, offensive gesture, but we still took the money.

I don't know what Joe did with his, but I bought a quarter pound with mine when I got back to New York. What I didn't smoke I sold in little bits for about a hundred bucks all together. Four ounces makes a fair sized pile of twenty dollar "lids".

We walked the mile up the dirt road kicking up a trail of dust as we went. When we came into sight of Paul's big farm, we were elated. *Real* people at last. It was almost as long a walk to the house from the road as it was up the road itself.

It was a huge house. Paul's family was old southern money and this had been the country vacation home in the twenties. The parents had set themselves up with more modern accommodations in Florida and left Paul to "work out this phase" in the old house.

"The Old House" was on a beautiful tract of land of over sixty acres that included fields, a little piece of forest that a brook ran through and small lake. Or was it a large pond? The place was home to about twenty cats who were half wild. They only got fed enough to ensure they hung around to keep the mice under control.

The house itself was huge. Not exactly a mansion but plenty big. Over twenty rooms in the main building which was a great Victorian pile with gables and porches sticking out seemingly everywhere. There was also two other buildings, one of which was a former stable which was in somewhat run down condition and the other had been a caretaker's cottage.

There were a couple of people on the roof of the big house who spotted us and waved. It was Big John and Daisy from New Hampshire.

Big John had taken to living out in the woods and was convinced that the world was going to end in the next few years. The result of this conviction was that he had built large and completely sealable basement on his cabin which he kept well stocked with

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water, canned goods and, it was rumored, guns and ammo. I always figured that if things ever came to that kind of extremity, stuff like that wouldn't do any good. His girlfriend Daisy was learning to be an expert auto mechanic and weaver.

"Damn!", I said, "We could have gotten a ride with them if we had known they were coming."

"What", said Joe, "and miss getting almost sodomized by rednecks?"

I rolled my eyes and we both laughed at the grim humor.

When we stepped through the front door of the house we were greeted by half a dozen friends. There were hugs and handshakes all around. Joanie wasn't with them and I was almost afraid to ask where she was. It turned out that she had gone to town with Will -from-Texas and his girlfriend Liz, to get some more food. They were late. Joe and I were both hoping that dinner would be soon.

The last food we had had was the strange baloney in Tennessee.

We were shown where to toss our packs and where we could

crash. Joe got put in a beautiful gabled room on the third floor of the big house. I got a room in the cottage.

So far there were not too many people there. I guess that me and Joe were not the only ones who had been delayed. This was going to be the biggest gathering of the year and I was looking forward to being with a lot of friends who I hadn't seen in months.

I got plenty of info about what was going on from those who were there.

Toadstool from Connecticut had called. He was only a few hours away. His much repaired Rambler had broken down in Tennessee, but he had been able to find a local garage which had the part he needed. He figured he would make it by midnight.

Howard Flanders had hitched down from Boston a few days before and had taken over the stereo. He had filled the house with mad, horn-honking progressive jazz.

I'll say one thing for this guy, he was a bold individualist. Surrounded by people who were into rock or folk music, he was a passionate champion of the music, which in this crowd, seemed like a throwback to the age of the beatnik.

It was actually pretty brave of Howard to follow this particular muse. In a group of supposed "nonconformists" it was of special importance to adhere to the norms of the group. The culture of music was especially important to group identification. Howard's taste in music was an outright challenge, seen by most as obnoxious noise. "I wonder what your parents say about rock?" He

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would ask his critics.

Everyone was impatiently waiting for Raymack to show up with his van load of records to oust him.

The two Johns were there although no one had been able to find them when there were dishes to be washed. The veggie girls had sworn that they would wash all of the dishes from the next two meals if they could pin them down.

Wings was up a tree somewhere playing his guitar out of earshot of the stereo. He found Howard's choice of music "unmellow". He still owed me some money because he hired me to paint a pair of wings on the back of his guitar. He was amazingly adept at dodging the issue whenever I brought it up. "You are such a slave of the money trip!" he would say. I would respond that I was also a slave of the food trip and that he had promised me twenty bucks. I didn't really expect to ever see the dough, but I was damned if he was going to get off guilt free.

Paul had told everyone to just make themselves at home. He was deeply involved in setting up the sound for his band which was going to play the following afternoon. He had bought the sound system from a band in California which had stopped touring. It had enough power to be used in a small stadium. I guess when they started to play, the party would really start. It was supposed to be three days, but Paul said people were welcome as long as they cared to stay.

Just as the sun was setting, Will, Liz and Joanie pulled up in Will's pickup truck.

The bed of the truck was replete with big bags of rice and

vegetables and loaves of bread not to mention a huge bag of granola. There were also several cases of beer but no sign of any

meat.

"The veggie girls!", I thought, "They have seized control of the kitchen!" Forgetting about my stomach for a moment, I ran down to the truck to help with the bags and collect a kiss from Joanie.

She was just beautiful even without clothing of any particular style. Actually she was dressed at the moment almost identically to me in a light blue work shirt, Levi's and light tan work boots. The ubiquitous "counter culture Amish" look. Where portions of her jeans had worn through, she had done wonderful embroidery to repair it. I myself had a sample of her work on my left knee. Even in the utilitarian clothing, there was no, I mean *zero*, chance of anyone mistaking her for anything but very beautiful woman.

"Adam! You're late! I was starting to worry about you. Did

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anything happen?"

"Nah", I said, "the usual shit. We just had to wait a long time for rides in a few places, had to talk with some staties. You know, the usual shit." I might have told her about the incident in the bar if I could have thought of a way to make myself sound like anything but a cowardly *schmo*, but I couldn't, so I didn't.

"Well, we ought to have a wonderful dinner in an hour or so! Why don't you go take a shower and wash some of the road off of you."

"Hmmm, join me?" I grinned.

She gave me a shy, sexy smile. "I have to cook, plenty of time for love later!" She kissed me again and then pushed me away. "Go wash up! You stink!"

"Love later.." I thought, "all right!"

As I walked down to the guest house, the birds were going to roost and the farm was held in the brief silence of twilight, that moment between the hushing of the day sounds and the start of the night sounds. Even the crickets change their tone and rhythm at this time. Just as I entered the cottage, I saw the first of the fireflies and a bat fluttered overhead on moleskin wings.

In the shower, the water ran brown off of my body and out of my hair until I had gone over myself twice. With a change of clothes I felt like a new man.

The cottage had four rooms, two of which had real beds in them. I had claimed one of these. Camped out in the other bedroom was a couple from Tennessee that I didn't know. I think their names were Billy and Diane. In the living room I counted three sleeping bags. No one had yet set up in the tiny den which contained a small upright piano as well as the only television on the property. There was a half kitchen with an empty refrigerator and the small bathroom which opened to both my bedroom and the den.

The militant vegetarian women who had taken on the job of feeding the masses knew how to set a fine table. There was corn-on -the-cob, hot biscuits, beer, wine, cheese and a lentil curry which I found pretty tasty. Joe looked like he thought we should have stayed for dinner with Bud and Frank, the rabbit hunters.

This table of friends was like a family to me. To some of us, our only family.

We had come from all over and met under different circumstances but over a few years we had become an almost nationwide network of semi vagabonds. Some of us had never met but had known one another by reputation. The core of the group had

emerged from a Quaker youth group, but I, of course, was not one

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of those. I had known Joe and Big John and Toadstool before we

called him Toadstool. He had met some of the others and they invited him and all his friends to visit them in upstate New York. That was four years ago. I remembered that it was a week before Kent State. It didn't take us long to figure out that these were the people we belonged with. We didn't have a formal name for ourselves except Friends. Capital "F" in homage to our Quaker core.

Almost monthly, somewhere there was a meeting of the Friends, some large and organized, some small and informal. This big party of Paul's was the second biggest of the year. In two months there was supposed to be a bigger "National" meeting somewhere in Pennsylvania, but I wasn't expecting to make that one.

We thought of ourselves as a new culture, valuing honesty, love and real reverence, not some fake paternalistic religion. Most of us had real world jobs or were students, but a surprising number of us were just travelers working odd jobs here and there and owning nothing more than the contents of a back pack or a motor vehicle of some description.

I guess I was sort of in-between. I more or less lived with my mother, but I was hardly ever home. Since my high school graduation, I had held a succession of part time or day jobs in dozens of places where I might have taken up residence for days, weeks or months. Mom never bothered me about finding a more stable life or getting a real job. I guess she trusted me to work things out for myself in my own time and I, in turn did my best to make sure that she never saw me do anything to make her feel she was wrong to do so. I was a legal adult and technically didn't have to answer to her for my actions, but I, unlike many of my friends, never felt the need to throw things in her face that I knew would just upset her. I'm sure that she was aware that I knew a lot of women and indulged in a vice or two, but we never made it a topic of conversation. The only thing she ever squeaked about was my cigarette habit, which was, I have to admit, in the long run the most likely to do me in.

Just as dinner was finishing up, Toadstool arrived with his hometown buddy Brad Pitson. Toadstool was a close friend who I had known for a bunch of years. His real name was Tom Grover, and he actually preferred being called Tom rather than Toadstool. He got the nickname when he got stoned at a gathering and sat all evening staring into space. When anyone asked him what he was doing, he replied "...just being a toadstool..". In spite of the fact

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that he claimed to not recall the incident, the name stuck.

He was a great hairy bear of a man who resembled everyone's vision of a lumberjack. He had a big bushy beard and only slightly longish hair. Already at the age of twenty-four he was pretty bald on top. He wore incongruously tiny round wire frame glasses which seemed so delicate in contrast to his "mountain man" image.

His size belied a shy and thoughtful nature. He was, however prone to frustration due to a learning disability. On occasion he could have major temper tantrums. He never took out his anger on people, he was aware enough of his own strength not to do that, but I had seen him punch a refrigerator hard enough to dent it and a tree hard enough to cause a fall of leaves.

He worked as a carpenter when he had work.

He had invited me to stay with him for a while and pick up some work on a house project he was starting in a couple of weeks. I

would most likely end up hauling buckets of nails around or some shit like that, but it would be work with a roof over my head and his mom's home cooking.

Tom's mom was a great practitioner of basic American cuisine. Anyone who had ever had occasion to visit Toadstool would talk about her fried chicken or her meatloaf or ever her mashed potatoes for a long time after.

Brad was a whole other animal. Unlike most of the guys, he preferred to wear his light brown hair short and combed straight back. A nice enough fellow, but prone to do stupid things like drive drunk or try to pick up biker's girlfriends.

They came inside and told me about their trip while they filled up on the leftovers from dinner. They had apparently broken down just a little south of Nashville, having completely fried some essential part of their engine. In explaining the nature of the problem they both drifted off into total gearhead lingo which I hadn't a clue about, which led them into an argument I couldn't even understand.

A couple of beers later peace and clarity was restored.

I figured that it would be politic of me to go to the kitchen and help out with the dishes, but when I got there I saw that the two Johns had been located and put to work.

These guys were like two peas in a pod. They had been best friends since elementary school. They were hardly ever seen apart and they spent most of their time plotting surrealist pranks. If anything really weird happened at a gathering, there was a good chance that they were at the bottom of it. Because of their

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humorless feminism and their food obsessions, the "veggie girls" were most frequently the object of their pranksterism. They were the only ones to refer to them as "veggie girls" in their presence. To which they always shrilly responded "*veggie women!*"

Megan Reilly was the one they counted on mostly to get a rise out of. She had no sense of humor (although, unfortunately, she *thought* she did) , which to the Johns, was an offense in and of itself, so every chance they got they did something to perturb her little world. That was o.k. in my book. I found Megan a little annoying anyway. She was a shameless gossip and prone to catty remarks which were her substitute for wit.

Joanie was nowhere to be seen but John Whalen said she was looking for me. John Reynolds said she might be on the upstairs balcony.

She was on the upstairs balcony all right. Wings was straddling her butt giving her a back rub with scented oil. He had lit several candles and was burning incense. His portable cassette player was spewing out Grateful Dead space jam.

"Hi!" I said.

Joanie looked up and murmured "Hi yourself!"

Wings frowned and said, "Oh, wow. You know...she's not going

be able to relax if you're here talking to her."

I thought, "And you won't be able to 'mellow' your way into her pants if I stay." I wasn't actually worried about Wings. He was way too transparent. He had chased Joanie for a year or so but had always blown it at the crucial second by doing something uncool.

I remember a time when he had really charmed a beautiful gal from California when he just caught a glance of another guy talking to her. He went up and tried to tell him to back off without knowing he was just her friend. She was utterly turned off by the whole scene and split. He was a walking bundle of repressed hostility.

He worked just a little too hard to cut a romantic figure. He was just enough the perfect hippie to come off as utterly false. The guy actually referred to a necklace he wore as "love beads", but claimed it was a joke when cornered.

Joanie said, "I want you to stay and talk to me. Wings don't worry about Adam."

Wings frowned deeply. "Whoa...I'm sharing my art with you. You need to relax....focus on the sensation. If you can't give it your full attention, maybe we ought to do this later."

He got up, grabbed the oil and his tape recorder and left in a self

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righteous huff to set off, no doubt, in search of other prey.

Joanie sat up, still shirtless. *Amazing* tits. "My left shoulder is still a little tight", she said, "Do you think you could work on it some?"

"Sure.", I said as I started to rub her pre-greased back. We chatted a little as my hands wandered farther over her body. In a short time all conversation had ceased.

About a half hour later Big John wandered onto the porch and quickly turned around saying "'Scuse me!", but neither of us really heard him.

Around midnight we wandered hand in hand down to my room in the little house and cuddled up until the next morning.

Not having had any sleep for two days, I slept through till around eleven. When I woke up, Joanie was already gone. I had a vague recollection of her having gotten up around nine and me complaining about her moving around. I hoped I hadn't gotten too surly with her.

I lit up a butt and stepped outside with just a towel around me to see what kind of day it was. Beautiful and sunny.

I saw Raymack's van, a repainted bread truck parked at the end of the drive as well as a few other vehicles. Raymack had painted a beautiful coat of arms on the side that featured R. Crumb's Mister

Natural shaking hands with the Quaker oats guy and the motto on a banner underneath reading *nihil melior est pro tu quam me*. I think it was Latin, *bad* Latin, for "nothing is better for thee than me".

Down by the pond a few people were swimming naked like country children. I dropped my towel and ran down to join them.

Fontayne was there having the time of his life swinging off a rope into the center of the pond, splashing everyone else. Gina, who I had had a little fling with last winter was there. I still admired her dark eyed beauty and tiny, but perfect body. She waded over and gave me a hug and a quick little kiss.

Ingrid from south Jersey was sunning herself on the shore. I hadn't seen her in half a year, she was obviously pregnant. I would have to ask her about the details later. Joe was there and a few others as well. We all had a grand time splashing around until the word reached us it was lunch time. I ran back to the cottage to get some clothes and then on to the big house.

Lunch was leftover lentils from the night before with fresh baked cornbread.

The meal was laid out in the large dining room because some fifty more people had shown up overnight and that morning.

I saw Joanie when she brought a big platter of cornbread to the

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table. She was now wearing a printed ankle length sort of country styled dress which billowed around her like a calico cloud. God, she was beautiful! It was only a matter of time before she figured out she was too good for me.

Sitting next to me was Jason. His real name wasn't Jason, it was Dennis McCarthy, but he liked to call



himself Jason and we liked him so we did too. He was a one man circus, all song and wit and fun. A really talented songwriter and an outspoken homosexual. He introduced the word "gay" to my vocabulary. All the homosexuals I had known before I met him had been "queers". He was telling me all about how he had been playing little clubs in northern California and how many pretty boys were there.

We had a cigarette together after lunch and he told me all about it.

"I got invited to this party.", He told me, "It was at the house of the parents of this guy from a band I played with out there. I got dressed up real nice and chatted up all these real straight people all night and sipped wine. I overheard this guy tell his mom I'm gay. She says 'My God! But he seemed so *nice*!' Can you *believe* it?!?" He did a wonderful imitation of her horrified expression.

I worried about Jason and frequently told him he ought to keep a

lid on the gay thing. He was always quick to ask when I was going to keep a lid on the straight thing, but I doubted that sort of argument would mean much to the type that me and Joe ran in with in that bar. Superior enlightenment was not in itself much of a shield.

"I also went to LA!" He told me, "God! Hollywood is *so* much seedier than I thought it would be! All these fake hippies pushing heroin. There are **lots** of gay people there, but they all seem to be on hard drugs and have bad friends. I have never been offered money for sex before in my life, but it happened, like, *three* times a day there! All these old guys who thought a few dollars would make me forget about their fat bloated bellies and their painted wives! Where is the love? Where is the glamour? Where is the beauty?" This last, he intoned like a Shakespearean actor with his hand grasping at the insubstantial. "I swear, Hollywood is an empire built on a mountain of *shit*! I got the hell out of *there* sweetheart!"

The thing about Jason was that he was just so much *more* than other folks. He could fill up a room all by himself and (most of the time) didn't even seem ostentatious about it. I suppose that some people might see his flamboyant personality as a symptom of

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insecurity, and it might well have been, but I still think those people were mostly jealous. Fact is, he really did irritate the living shit out of some people. He was loud and colorful in a low key, mellow culture. That by itself could piss people off.

I had become pretty good friends with Jason's brother Dudley. That wasn't *his* real name either. It was Roy, and I have no idea why he used Dudley. So go figure. Dudley was the exact opposite of his brother. Heterosexual, most women seemed to think obnoxiously so and more intellectual than emotional. He was a dedicated Marxist who could bend your ear for hours about the coming revolution. Sometime before I met him I heard he had been a Jesus freak, but he had put God aside in favor of dialectical materialism. I suspected that he had been attracted to both movements in order to meet women. For years, this guy made an art form out of unemployment and managed to go for months at a time with no discernible amount of money. In any city in the USA, Dudley would know where to get a free meal, which, I had to admit, was a useful talent.

I could hear that Paul was already tuning up the band out front. They were going to be using the big front

porch for their stage. I went into the kitchen to help with the clean up and talk with Joanie.

She was doing something or other with a big pile of tofu. I didn't pay that much attention, I can eat that vegetarian stuff if I don't worry too much about what goes into it.

"Working on dinner already?" I walked over and hugged her from behind. "Are you going to stay in here and be a drudge all day?"

"Uh-uh, I'm just setting up a few things. I'll let the others take care of dinner, I did breakfast almost all by myself."

She was up to her elbows in the squishy bean curd, evidently mixing in spices. She semi-ignored my attentions.

I pulled her tight against me enjoying the feel of her body. There was nothing beneath the thin cotton fabric of her dress and I let my

hands wander up to play with her titties. She giggled, but

threatened to mash raw tofu into my face if I didn't stop.

"You run along and play", she said, "I just need to do about another half hour of work. Gowan! Beat it!" She could let the sharp accent of North Jersey lend authority to her voice when she wanted to.

We shared a quick kiss and I screamed.

Howard Flanders was in the smaller of the two living rooms going through a pile of Raymack's records.

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"Flan the man!" I greeted

"He does what he can!" he responded. We tried to bear hug each other to death, he was the first to beg for mercy.

Howard pointed to the huge stack of records. "Can you believe this crap? I have never seen such a congregation pseudo-intellectual sputum in one place!"

I was looking through the pile of vinyl. Yes, Pink Floyd, Woodstock soundtrack, King Crimson, Gentle Giant, Country Joe and the Fish, Incredible String Band, Fairport Convention, the Beatles ..flip...flip..flip. To my mind not a bad collection, I liked all of these records but I still preferred Ragtime and twenties and thirties Jazz.

"What's wrong with this stuff?" I asked.

Howard got that look he gets. "It hasn't got any *charge*, man, no *pulse*! They have bled any of the true African roots out of American music! They are trying to kill our Jazz roots, man!"

I rolled my eyes, this was familiar territory for me. I listened anyway.

"Come *on*, old fellow, do you seriously think that the *Beach Boys* are on par with *Ellington*? Do you think that the derivative drivel of *Yes* has as much interest as the inspired madness of *Sun Ra*? Well... you may, but not I, I assure you."

Half the fun of hearing this rap from him was that it was always delivered in this uppercrust New England accent which would have sounded more at home calling for tea and crumpets, or whatever the hell those people eat, rather than raving about horn powered sonic abstraction from crazy Negroes.

His pile of records included the Jazz Composer's Orchestra, Ornette Coleman, Art Ensemble of Chicago, Don Cherry, Sun Ra, Paul Horn, Thelonius Monk, Charlie Parker, Duke Ellington, Roland Kirk, Frank Zappa (the sole representative of the rock genre), Charles Mingus and the dreaded (to my mind) Pharaoh Sanders plus tons of people I had never heard of.

He had cleared a room with a crazy-mad honking Pharaoh Sanders record at a gathering in New Hampshire a couple of months back.

"In ten years", he said pointing to Raymack's stack, "you won't be able to listen to any of that stuff, old man." He then picked up a handful from his pile. "This", he said, "is timeless. This is our true musical heritage."

As if on cue, his last words were washed out by the beginnings of

a folk-rock ballad from the porch.

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The music of Paul's band was very professional sounding, but wasn't to either me or Howard's taste. We split to check out the

woods. On the way we dropped by the cottage where we each took one of my blotters just to make the afternoon a little more interesting. I figured that Joanie would want to listen to the band and I would be on the downslope of the trip before she was ready to spend any time with me.

The woods were not extensive covering only about ten acres of Paul's property, but they were beautiful and mostly untouched. There was none of the trash that I was used to seeing in more public stands of trees. Not at all like the little woods near my mom's place in suburban New York where there was always the remains of a bum's campsite or a high schooler's beer party.

Paul had lectured everyone about keeping the property clean. He even asked that we "field strip" our cigarette butts so that they would degrade more easily. It also helped to assure us that the stubs were completely extinguished.

These trees had no names carved into their bark and there were no used prophylactics in the fallen leaves. The birds sang a sweet symphony and the wind gently rustled the leaves sounding like a bunch of tiny rattles.

The acid was hitting us really nice. Howard and I spent less and less time talking and more and more time

just staring at things. The texture of the tree bark or the glitter of mica in a stone.

I climbed way up to the top of one of the trees and looked out across a landscape of green through which little birds, seemingly made from jewels by some expert hand, jumped and played. Insects with sounds like tiny distant airplanes buzzed around my head telling me little jokes with surreal punchlines.

Howard hollered from below so I made my way back down into the depths. On the way down a squirrel favored me with chattering insults.

Howard waited impatiently for my report from above. His irises were almost nonexistent, his eyes caves of shining blackness. He was a cave man. A primitive who instinctively knew that a spirit dwelt in all things.

"The Gods are happy." I said.

Howard grinned from ear to ear and muttered something that sounded like a combination between a Sumerian prayer and a mathematical equation. In retrospect, I think he might just have

said "Huh?".

The little piece of forest also seemed to be the ocean floor. From

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the corners of my eyes, I saw fish swimming among the tree trunks. They would streak away in a whirl of bubbles and hide until I again

turned away. They giggled at me in liquid fish voices, but when I finally sat still they would swim up to me and tell me their legends and sing me their songs. Among the fish wandered a great friendly ape rolling in the leaves and laughing. He laughed colored clouds that were shaped like animal crackers.

The fish were explaining how **everything** had come *together* and become one and how they could remember an ancient time when things were not so but the ape distracted me with his multitude of happy hijinks and the fish were telling me of a time of discord when monkeys flew like birds and every fish owned a suitcase where they kept their *idealism* while the ape rolled around and made loud hoot, *hoot*, **hooting** noises and my own hands sort of started to float away and turn into fish themselves but they said that was only an *illustration*, an object lesson, if you will, but they wouldn't tell me of what and they laughed at me again so I playfully swatted at them and they swam away as the ape devolved into some sort of porcupine with a cigarette hanging out of its mouth and said, "Adam..... you are the first man."

And I said "Howard, I am the *last fish*!" the porcupine became a man who hollered the word "**FISH!!!!**" at the top of his lungs and then fell into the leaves in laughter.

A couple, hoping to find a bit of privacy for some open air love, no doubt, wandered into the clearing where we frolicked.

Howard looked them over and turned to me. He spoke in a stage whisper. "I can't tell", he confided, "if those are *rock* people or *rubber ball* people."

They greeted us cheerfully and wandered off. "Far out." Giggled the girl.

"Perhaps they were *feather* people....." Mused Howard.

The afternoon dissolved into a miasma of cosmic Christopher Robinism where we found many an adventure. I'm afraid we severely alarmed a cat by trying to speak its language. We made contact with the Tadpole Empire and watched the ants have a war. We attempted, unsuccessfully (and at the cost of a few painful bites), to help them find a diplomatic solution.

It was late afternoon before we found our brains starting to shift gears back to more linear modes of thought.

Howard's watch said it was about five-thirty. We were still tripping but we were ready to deal with other people now. We vaguely remembered the music coming to an end about an hour

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before. It seemed like a good time to head back to the house.

We came out of the woods near the pond. Nude hippies lay on its bank like basking seals. One of them was Joanie.

By her side crouched Wings who was talking to her.

"Howdy!" I called.

Wings' head snapped up and his face fell at the same moment. Logic told me they should have parted company but somehow his head remained in one piece. Oh well, maybe next time.

Joanie was somewhat happier to see me. She ran up to me and gave me a hug and a kiss. Her skin felt fantastic. Warm and smooth and just the total *essence* of girlness.

"Where the fuck have you *been*?" She asked with an only slightly peevish pout.

"Me and Howard took a walk in the woods."

She checked out our maniac grins. She adopted a comic California surfer chick accent "Omygod! You look *sooo* weird! Are you, like, *stoned*?"

I took mock umbrage and straightened my posture. "*Stoned*? Good *heavens* no!" With a flourish of my index finger I declared "My good woman, I'll have you know we're *tripping*!"

Joanie rolled her eyes. "Oh, Jesus Christ. Are you peaking?"

"Nope...peaked hours ago. Just a little goofy now. The trails are almost gone. Honest."

"Good, I can't understand a damned thing you say when you're really out there. Its like talking to a cartoon character."

Howard was staring at Joanie's nipples. "Pink.....pert.....pointy....pretty....peachy....perky...." He said.

I shot him an evil look and Joanie said "*Behave* Howard." and smiled sweetly. Howard stood there popping his P-words at Joanie a few more seconds before he collapsed laughing.

Wings tugged at my sleeve like a child trying to be noticed and asked me if I had anymore acid. I told him I would fix him up with a hit or two later, even then knowing that he would think of some way to make me regret it. He thanked me and wandered off to play his guitar.

Joanie dressed and we walked up to the house together leaving Howard to take a dip. When we left he was floating on his back humming some sort of strange jazzy melody just to annoy Wings.

I had a little snack with Joanie up at the big house. Some of the spiced tofu she had been playing with earlier, now fried into tasty

little bite-sized chunks.

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She wanted to go hang out with Ingrid, who was one of her best friends but she hadn't seen her in a while. She and Ingrid and a few others liked to get together and do improvisational dance.

Joanie told me that Ingrid had gotten pregnant at a gathering several months back by a fellow named Sean who wasn't here or, for that matter, anywhere she knew about. She had decided against an abortion being unable to rationalize it with her vegetarianism, so she had opted to carry the child to full term and then put it up for adoption. I had to admit that I admired her consistency.

I made a mental note to look in on them. Ingrid ought to be quite a sight dancing with her big belly.

I told her that I would be around if she was looking for me and

then headed back to the cottage for a shower and a fresh shirt.

My skin ended up getting all pruny because I spent too much time letting the water splash against my eyelids making psychedelic phosphenes on my retinae.

I was just putting on my boots when Wings walked in.

"Hey Adam! What's happening?"

"Not much, Wings. Just had a shower." The acid was just a bit of an annoying itch in my brain now. A sensation that one friend of mine had named that "crispy critters" feeling. I know it sounds dumb, but believe me its a perfect description. This stuff was nice, but it gave kind of a short trip. I generally expect a full dose of acid to last eight to twelve hours and the main portion of this trip had lasted a little under six.

"I thought I would come by and get some of that acid. Y'got some for me?"

"Sure, man." I pulled a folded sheet from my glasses case. "I got sheets of ten, half a buck a hit."

"Is it good? I got some last month that had a lot of strychnine in it."

I rolled my eyes. I had heard this goddamned strichnine story too many times. "Look, Wings. Look at the *size* of a hit of acid. There isn't even a whole lot of LSD in a hit of acid, let alone a lot of anything else. The dose is measured in *micrograms*, for Christ's sake. Its the acid itself that can give you tight jaws sometimes."

He looked a little confused at the idea that I would reject this bit of drug folklore. "Well", he assured me darkly, "it had a lot of *something* in it."

"Yeah, yeah.....so, you want some?"

"Sure, can I get a sheet and pay you later?"

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"C'mon, man. You already owe me twenty bucks."

"I thought that painting was a *spiritual* gift, man."

I resigned myself to writing off that debt. I was going to be more trouble than it was worth to collect and I would make myself look like an asshole in the process.

"O.K., lets say it was a 'spiritual gift' and leave it at that, but I would have to be a real *schmuck* to do nothing but give you everything."

"Aw, you shouldn't judge yourself so harshly, man."

"Huh?" I said. My patience was fraying.

"Just because you, like, have the cash trip together, you think you can control all the resources. You should help out those of us who won't work. We're living your ideal, man!"

"Have you been hanging out with Dudley?"

"Seriously, man, its your duty to the cause."

"Since when is *my* cause getting *you* high?? I'm not rich, you know. I don't even have a part time job any more!" I lit a butt and inhaled deeply hoping for the calming nicotine to reach my brain as quickly as possible.

"Whoa, man, you are so hostile! O.K., man, look. I can sell some of the acid at a buck and a half a hit and pay for it that way."

"Yeah, that sounds like the *spiritual* way to do it. Look, do you have five bucks on you?"

He took on the look of a deer nailed by headlights. "Uh.... yeah....."

"So pay me for the acid and then you can get your money back by selling some, right?"

"I need to get smokes, man, and some guitar strings too." Hmmmm... maybe he was more like a skunk on the highway, convinced that his odor alone would let him face down anything.

I had already spent far too much time wrangling with this clown. His was the art of weaseldom. He was good at this, sooner or later he would wear me down.

Eventually, I gave him one hit to try it out and sent him away happy. I *still* felt like a schmuck.

This whole business was absurd. I only had this stuff because people wanted it and I was selling it at the same price I bought it for. I was never a good drug dealer and gave up selling very shortly after that summer. Leave it for those who are more patient and/or ruthless than me.

There was food up at the house, but no formal sit down type dinner. When I went into the kitchen to get something, I was

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intercepted by Joe.

He whispered to me as he opened up a small paper bag in his hand. "Take a look in here, man."

The bag contained a small butcher paper wrapped package with a supermarket deli sticker on it reading "\$1.34"

"Is that.....?" I asked.

"Lean, sliced, roast beef, my friend."

"Let's find some bread and mustard!"

While we were making sandwiches, Dudley wandered in and we all had one together. It was a nice break from lentils and granola.

Dudley had arrived while Howard and I were talking to the fish. He had hitched all the way from Chicago where he was hanging out with some fellow pinkos. He and Jason were expected at some family function at their parents home in Concord, Mass. Brad and Toadstool were going to give them both a ride up. "*That* ought to be a car full 'o fun." I thought.

I told Dudley that I knew where he could get some work in Boston if he wanted to hang out for a while. Howard was always passing employment information my way trying to entice me to move up there. I knew more about getting work in Boston than in my home town.

"Nah", he said, "its best if I'm not in the same state as my parents for more than a few days at a time. They have a sick psychic influence over me." He twirled his finger next to his temple.

He had recently gotten little round glasses. Those along with a



new haircut and mustache trim made him look astonishingly like a stoned out Leon Trotsky. The last time I had seen him, the look was more like Groucho Marx.

We sat in jovial company making a feast of roast beef sandwiches and beer from the can. I look back and try to remember what we talked about that afternoon, but no specifics come back. I do remember that it was one of those conversations about nothing and everything at the same time.

Books....food...women...movies... philosophy....life...love, *the whole schmeer*. At some point, Dudley pulled out a joint of weak but tasty homegrown which, in short order, led us to make up another sandwich for each of us from the last of the precious meat.

We heard folky instrumental music from the stereo and stepped out to investigate.

The women were dancing in the big living room. To my bemusement, they were joined by the two Johns who had dressed

themselves in loin cloths and primitive face paint. Their jumping

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and prancing was an interesting counterpoint to the measured and delicate movement of the women.

Ingrid seemed hardly slowed down by her pregnancy; I only hoped she didn't fall.

Joanie was.....beautiful....graceful. She had no training in dance, but it still resonated as pure art. Her style was all soul and energy. It gave me a hardon just to watch her. The dancers were creating something which seemed to transcend nation and history. They easily moved from almost Balinese style flat footed posturing to leaps into the air like those of a Russian ballerina. What looked like a Greek circle dance would evolve effortlessly into an American square dance.

We left them to their gyrations and headed down to the cottage. There was a piano there and Joe wanted to play.

Joe was an eccentric improvisational piano player. He *meditated* at the keyboard. He once told me that this was how he conversed with his own subconscious.

He was brilliant even with the occasional clinker. He wandered from theme to theme with echoes of rock, classical, funk, jazz, ragtime and something foreign, perhaps religious in nature. I really loved listening to the wild rhythms he would come up with. He never played with a band, even informally. His tangent was way too personal to be able to work with other musicians.

Before long Joe had forgotten that anyone else was in the room with him. Dudley was the first to wander off and after a while I

almost felt I was intruding on Joe's inner mind.

I left him pounding away in the cottage and stepped out to see the sunset.

Paul was up by the house still breaking down the band stuff with Jerry, the drummer. I had never met Jerry

before the previous day but he seemed like a real nice guy. He had just gotten out of the army and had cut his military style haircut down to a short mohawk to celebrate. He was quick to show me that he had just gotten his name tattooed on his ass with a picture of a snare and crossed drumsticks.

Paul embraced me firmly. "Adam! Man, I haven't had a chance to say two words to ya since ya got here! How the hell ya been?"

"Working a little...traveling. I've been trying to hit all the gatherings while I can, then I'm going to go work with Tom for a while."

"You a carpenter?"

"Fuck, no! Its a low wage, 'helper' kind of gig, but its something

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to do, ya'know?"

"That's cool. If you just need something to do you and Toadstool should come down here when it gets cold up north. I want to convert the stable into a real house and I'm inviting people from all over to come and work on it a little at a time. I can't pay too much but you'll definitely be in mellow surroundings."

It sounded great. "Wow, I'll bounce that off Tom and see what he thinks. How cold does it get down here?"

He tossed his head to get some blonde locks out of his eyes. "Gets cold enough I s'pose, but I don't expect to get much snow.....hell of a lot better than New York or Boston or someplace like that."

"I'm gonna really have to think about that. Thanks for the invite, Paul."

"Taint nothing my friend.", He said, "Y'all would be helping me out a lot."

This was how I lived, traveling from one opportunity to the next, my only concern being three square meals a day, a place to lay my head at night and the company of good friends.

A seeming caravan of vehicles were now parked at the head of the dirt road. It turned out that Frank and Bud had shown up with their friends and wives from the commune who were welcomed by Paul enthusiastically, particularly when he saw that they had brought lots of food and beer. They had also brought about twenty bouncing children who had taken over the yard tossing Frisbees,

laughing and wrestling. As the evening crept over the day the new sport became chasing fireflies in which the kids were joined by many of the adults.

I just watched for a little while, absorbing the scene as one of those perfect summer moments before I went inside.

There were about a dozen people hanging out in the living room chatting and drinking coffee or tea. A layer of cigarette smoke was hanging about a foot from the ceiling.

I cut through into the kitchen hoping to find Joanie. No luck, but Brad was there loading about five cases of beer into the already crowded refrigerator.

There was a woman with him who looked kind of straight. She wore tight jeans and a western style shirt. Her blonde hair was teased up into a great and sticky looking, spray laden confection of flips and curls.

There was something unnatural about the way her breasts thrust forward. It dawned on me that it was because she was wearing a

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bra, which made her, quite literally, stand out in this group. She appeared to be well over thirty but was somewhat attractive in a white trashy kind of way.

At the table were Toadstool and a girl named Gretchen Winters who I knew only slightly. I had *noticed* her though. She was only fifteen and a sometime runaway from a good Boston area family. Her father owned a sugar company and was well able to give her anything a girl could want. The problem was that what she didn't want was to be a little rich girl at a private school. She looked like anything but a private school girl now, wearing beat up sandals, torn cut-offs and a Grateful Dead "Europe '72" tour t-shirt, the one with the ice cream cone motif. Her straight black hair was worn loose and reached to her mid back.

The most common physical description of this girl I would hear, at least if it was a guy describing her, would always include adjectives like "ripe", "juicy", "nubile" and even "succulent". Her restrictive early life had built in her a need for sowing some serious wild oats, much to the benefit of several guys I knew. Indeed, she was at that age when some girls were in the greatest danger from predatory males. She knew that but didn't take it to heart and seemingly sought that danger actively. I admit that I was always watching when she walked or smiled or bent over. She knew that men watched and she loved the attention. Her maturing body was still a new toy.

Toadstool was trying to teach her some arcane card game. I don't even remember what it was called, but I think it was something pretty exclusive to the area he grew up in.

Brad greeted me and tossed me a beer.

"Hey man! Sit down and have one or two with us!"

"Far out!" I said. I sat down at the table and tried to figure out why Tom and Gretchen were throwing down and picking up various cards. I've never been good at card games and this one looked more complicated than most.

Brad introduced me to his female companion. "This is Sharlene, I met her in town and invited her up."

"Hi hon." She said as I shook her hand. Her nails were about an inch beyond her finger tips and painted a pearly pink color.

She turned to Brad. "Mah God, Bradley! I have nevah seen so many of these *long hair boys* in one place in mah whole life! My ex- husband swears that hippies are all queer, but I see that doesn't apply to you." She gave a slight smirk.

"Bradley???" I thought.

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She talked like innumerable truck stop waitresses I had run into. I was only slightly ashamed of wondering if she turned tricks on the side.

Brad looked a little uncomfortable and I said, using my finely honed ironic wit, "Yeah, we're just a gang of damned dirty Godless faggot hippies here to spread anarchy and seduce the daughters of decent people."

Sharlene didn't know how to react. Evidently she had a poorly developed sense of sarcasm.

"He's kidding!" Said Brad. "He's *kidding*, for Christ's sake." He gave me a look which implored me not to act too weird. I have no idea why he wanted a woman like this. It was an unspoken rule that the straight world belonged to the straights and the freak world belonged to the freaks. You can call it prejudice if you want. I just called it common sense. Bringing someone like this here could end up getting the party busted.

Sharlene said to Brad, "Where's th'dope? You said you could turn me onto some weed." I relaxed a little on the getting busted issue. Perhaps the remains of the acid had made me slightly paranoid.

I found a church key and opened up my beer. It was cold and good. "Hamms" it said on the can. I had never heard of the brand, must have been only distributed in the south. When I had been on the west coast, I remember seeing and drinking brands like "Coors" and "Rainier". In Pennsylvania, "Strohs" and "Rolling Rock". In

Boston, "Narragansett" or "Carling".

Brad said, "Hey 'Toadstool', where's that can o' weed?"

Tom looked up from his cards. "Aw, don't call me that, man. I got it right here." He pulled an aluminum, screw top film can out of his breast pocket and handed it to Brad who dispensed some into a double wide cigarette paper and rolled it up. He tossed the joint to Sharlene and said, "Light it up, sweet thing."

After taking a deep toke she handed the weed to Tom, who sucked hard and turned beet red as he held the smoke. He gripped the edge of the table and prominent veins bulged on his forehead. Gretchen, who sat right next to him looked very alarmed at the transformation. He looked like his head was going to explode.

Finally, he let his breath out and his face returned to more or less its normal color. A broad grin crept across his features.

"Jesus fucking Christ on a crutch, man!" Exclaimed Brad, "You frighten the women when you do that!"

Tom started to giggle. It was sort of high pitched like it was coming from a little girl.

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"Aw shit," I said, "here we go."

Tom's laughter just kept going and got weirder in pitch ranging across several octaves. This was something that sounded like it ought to be emanating from behind a locked door in a lunatic asylum. Tom's eyes were squeezed shut and tears ran down his cheeks as his body convulsed. It was an unholy, demonic sound.

Brad laughed himself (although in a *much* more normal fashion) and shook his head as he took a few hits of the weed for himself. Gretchen bit her lower lip in apparent concern and I signaled Brad for the joint.

As I was taking a hit, Tom was finally starting to calm down a little. "Y'know", I said, "If you could harness that power, you could light New York for a week!" I was noticing that this was actually pretty good weed.

With tears still wetting his face, Tom replied with a breathless, "Shit.....I'm sorry.....can't help it...."

Gretchen bummed a cigarette off me and took a deep slug from her beer. I was momentarily transfixed by her prominent nipples pushing against the thin fabric of her t-shirt as she threw her head back. Sharlene caught me looking and winked slyly.

I frowned a little. It bugged me to be caught looking by this woman with the knowing smile. She had no idea what we were about. How *dare* she make assumptions. Just having someone like her around attached a weird and icky flavor to everything I did or thought or what she *thought* I thought. *We* were not like *them*. She thought that we were, but I knew we weren't. She was, like, interfering with my sense of my own purity. The whole thing just pissed me off. It was a classic case of pot induced paranoia if ever there was one.

"I'm going up to the roof." I said. "I'll be back down later."

"Can I come with you?" Asked Gretchen. "I'm tired of playing cards."

"Sure," I said. "Come ahead."

There was sort of a deck on the roof which was about the size of half a tennis court.

Night had fallen and the sky was full of stars only slightly washed out near the southern horizon by the light of Birmingham. Above was completely black with so many stars that they were beyond counting. I lay on my back and tried to position myself so that nothing but the stars were in my sight.

This was the temple of my religion, the inky dome of night.

I drank in the vision of infinity and felt a great comfort and

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calm.

Gretchen sat cross legged beside me humming to herself. She was accompanied by the croaking of the frogs in the distant pond and the thrumming of countless crickets. I pointed out celestial features to her. Jupiter was high in the western sky a few degrees to the right of the moon which was three quarters full. Mars was also visible closer to the horizon. Mostly I pointed out stars and constellations.

"Those stars, all the ones you see", I said, "have planets of their own."

"All of them?" She asked.

"Well, most of them. Most astronomers think that planetary systems are a normal consequence of stellar evolution. A small percentage of those planets, maybe only one percent or less will be capable of harboring life. Of those maybe one percent or less of those will harbor sentient life and civilization. It doesn't sound like

much, but that makes over a million civilizations in this galaxy alone and there are as many galaxies as there are stars in this one." I was talking through my hat here. I actually was lousy at math, but it sounded impressive.

"Wow!" Said Gretchen. She laid down beside me to get the same view. "So you believe in *aliens*?"

"They would only be 'aliens' if they were here. Out there is their home. If we went to visit them, *we* would be the aliens. To me it doesn't seem like a fantastic concept. It would be far more amazing if there were no life anywhere but here. Our solar system is to our galaxy as one atom is to a house. Our galaxy is to the universe as that house is to the Earth. How many of those atoms are unique?" Again, my math stunk, but the point was made and she didn't dispute it.

"But what about the flying saucers?"

"I don't know *what* that's about. All I know is that the Universe is so big that *anything* might be possible." I hated talk about UFOs. It was like the notion cheapened our view of extra terrestrial life, changed it from a scientific inquiry and a spiritual opportunity into a snickering tabloid story.

"It makes me feel small.....insignificant." Said Gretchen.

"We are small, but we make our own significance."

Gretchen said she was chilly so I put my arm around her and she snuggled up close to me. We watched as meteors streaked across the sky and a few satellites silently crossed from horizon to

horizon.

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I continued lecturing about the heavens but was becoming more and more aware of her body against mine. The evening chill had hardened her nipples and they pressed into my side making them impossible to ignore.

"The two closest galaxies to ours are the Clouds of Magellan which orbit the Milky Way. They aren't visible in the northern hemisphere. They were discovered by the explorer Magellan when he became the first to sail around the world."

Gretchen was gently stroking my stomach. I admit I made no attempt to stop her.

"They are smaller than our galaxy," I continued, "but it still takes light several hundred years to cross from end to end of one of them."

Her hand was now stroking my crotch with immediate and predictable results. She turned her head to mine and kissed my lips to which I eagerly responded. Unbuttoning my shirt, she kissed her way down my body. She undid my belt and then my zipper with surprising expertise. With more specific, gentle, eager and very skillful use of her lips, she soon made me truly one with the cosmos.

The stars whirled overhead as Gretchen pleased me down below and all else around dissolved. I was at the center of a spinning universe of erotic sensation which erupted into stars within me as well as without as I explosively climaxed.

I heard a muffled grunt and swallowing from Gretchen. That decidedly earthy sound pulled me back from the numinous and

cosmic to the here and now.

Almost immediately upon my physical release, I realized that a mistake had been made, particularly when I heard the applause from Brad and Sharlene who had wandered up to the roof during our "distraction".

I was horrified. I could have stood to have almost anyone witness that except Sharlene. Sharlene of the knowing smirk. Sharlene of the dirty little wink.

Gretchen was grinning widely and gave a mock bow as I scrambled to my feet and arranged my clothing.

"How long have you guys been there?" I asked as casually as I could manage.

"Just long enough to catch the main feature." Said Brad. He loved things like this, a somewhat sadistic portion of his personality.

"For a little bit of jail bait", said Sharlene, "she sure looks like she knows what she's doing! Lordy! Does she ever." She was laughing.

She saw the look on my face and subsided somewhat. "Oh, c'mon,

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hon, y'all were just actin' natural. 'Taint nothin' to get yourself all

worked up over." Her eyes focused on my poorly hidden erection. "At least not more than *necessary*!" She started laughing.

What followed was one of those moments that I wished instantly to have been able to undo.

"You're wrong about what you're thinking. I love this girl. We love each other."

Gretchen stopped short and looked at me in wonder. "You do?" she asked.

Time slowed down stretching this tortured moment into a seeming infinity.

"Of *course* I do." I said. I was all but choking on my own insincerity. I felt like a total and complete schmuck.

I was in a kind of panic trying desperately to save face before a stranger and in the process setting myself up to appear to be a major asshole to my friends. Maybe I should make that just *being* an asshole. I felt little for this girl. She was *nice* and could have been a good friend, but there should have been no pretense of a romantic relationship. I could have halted her advances or failing that, merely enjoyed the moment as a passing pleasure and made nothing more of it. Instead, I had chosen the path that would insure the most damage.

The uncomfortable moments that I spent before I found an excuse to leave the roof, I would prefer to forget. The entire previous hour of my life, I would have preferred to eradicate.

The singing crickets mocked me as I headed through the darkness to the cottage.

I heard Joanie singing in the shower.

Thankfully, none of the other five people using the cottage to sleep were around. I rapped on the door of the bathroom.

"Who's there?" Came her voice.

"Adam." I said, "I gotta take a leak."

"C'mon in."

I entered. She was soaping herself in the stall. I used the toilet and then closed the lid and sat down.

I lit up a smoke and took a deep drag, let it out and took another. "I gotta to talk to you." I said. She froze for an instant, sensing the peculiar tone in my voice.

She wrung out her hair and said, "Just let me finish." She rinsed off and stepped out of the stall wrapping a towel around her waist.

"What's wrong?" She asked.

"I made a mistake.", I said, "I made a bad mistake."

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"What did you do?" She actually looked alarmed now.

" I was up on the roof with that runaway girl, Gretchen."

"Up on the roof." She repeated.

"We were looking at the stars."



Joanie rolled her eyes. She and I had first made love after an evening of stargazing. It was one of my tried and true "routines".

Her voice took on a chilly tone. "So.....did you *screw*?"

"No!" I protested and then, as if it would make a difference, "I let her.....I didn't stop her from....." I had no idea how to say it.

"From what?"

"From giving me a blow job."

She made a sour face and obviously wasn't thrilled by the news, but she saw that I was upset. "Its not the world's biggest deal, Adam. We have both slept with other people. We have never been exclusive."

"I *want* us to be though. I want to be with you and *only* you."

"Then why are you having *little girls* suck your cock?!?" Her voice had taken on a justifiably sharp tone. The way she said "little girls" made Gretchen sound like a five year old rather than a fifteen year old who just *sweats* sex from every pore. Besides, she was only four or five years younger than me.

"I have no idea. I really don't." It was a lie, but the truth was too stupid to tell her. I was stoned and I had let my dick do my thinking for me, that's all. The truth just wouldn't make a very good excuse in this situation.

"Jesus, Adam. You get all bent out of shape when I spend any time with another guy, but you sleep with other women all the time. We

know all the same people, I hear all about it , you know." She paced as she spoke making her breasts bounce back and forth distractingly.

"Hey", I said, "Gretchen was the only other woman I've touched since we were together in Boston!"

"That was only a *week* ago! You told me you loved me, that you wanted to be with only me, and you couldn't keep your hands off other women for even that long."

"Look, I *do* love you. I made a mistake. She came on to *me*. Please..... I didn't have to tell you about this, but I wanted to be honest. I don't have any kind of relationship with her and she has no expectations of me."

She gave me a hard stare. "I don't like it when you assume I'm stupid. You rushed down here to tell me about this before I could hear it from someone else. This isn't honesty, this is damage

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control."

She had it exactly right. I *had* thought that I could control how this went down by telling her first. Like the

pilot of a crippled airplane, I was just striving for a landing I could at least walk away from. There was nothing to do but push myself further into scumbag territory.

I tried to work up a watery eye. "I'm really hurt", I said, "that you believe that that is the way I think." Catching a bit of cigarette smoke in my eye just the right way made an actual tear run down my cheek. "I try to come to you because I realize I was wrong and you think I'm trying to manipulate you."

Her hard look collapsed, she looked truly sorry. My ploy had worked, I had pushed the female "nurture" button.

She knelt down and put her arms around me and said, "I'm sorry..... I'm *so* sorry Adam, I know you love me and I love you too."

I ran my hand over the soft clean skin of her naked back.

She looked up into my eyes with a slightly playful smile. "So", she asked, "was she as good as me?"

"Nowhere near as good." I said. Actually, at that particular form of oral love, Gretchen was better than anyone I had ever been with, but I would have been a supreme idiot to have said so. In retrospect, I don't think that little bit of restraint did much to save me from being a supreme idiot.

I led Joanie to the bedroom where we made love slowly well into the night. Considering my recent release, it was pretty easy to make sure that she received the maximum pleasure from the experience. We fucked ourselves sore and then some until we had to yield to pure exhaustion.

Of course, the real problem had not gone away.

I woke the next morning before Joanie. She slept like a log beside

me, her body exuding heat and that wonderfully rich yet subtle *woman* smell. I planted a kiss in the small of her back which elicited an inarticulate mutter.

I got up, took care of business and headed up to the house. I wanted to track down Joe because we had to hitch out of here today.

As I walked through the living room, picking my way through a carpet of occupied sleeping bags, I spotted Brad and Sharlene sharing a bag in the corner. I was slightly amused to see that her elaborate blond hair had been a wig which now sat atop Brad's

back pack. Her own hair was slightly darker and at this moment in

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a truly amazing tangle. I imagined the energy of the sex which got it that way. I was tempted to kick her in the head.

I went into the kitchen to see if I could find a cup of coffee. Thankfully, Megan was in there and she had already started a pot.

I bid her good morning and begged a cup of the black elixir from her.

As I was taking my second sip, Megan said, "Weren't the stars lovely last night?"

I wasn't even thinking as I started to answer. "Yes.....they were beauti....." An internal alarm went off. She knew. If Megan knew, *everyone* knew. "Yeah, it was a nice clear night."

"I love to look at the stars on a country night. Of course being a *vegetarian*, I can't enjoy it the way Gretchen does."

Shit. This is why a lot of people found Megan obnoxious. She was horribly catty and not even very *good* at it.

"Meg, I hope you don't think that was a *clever* innuendo because I've heard more subtle quips in a locker room."

She stuck her tongue out at me. "Okay, so I'm not clever. You're not either. How could you *do* that to Joanie."

"Joanie knows about it...everything's cool. She knows I love her."

"Then how come you told Gretchen you loved *her*? She was bragging that you were her guy all night."

The human mind is an amazing thing. In ten seconds I plotted how I might rush down to the cottage, grab my pack and be on the road with my thumb out before Joanie was out of bed. It seemed like escape was a reasonable way to deal with the situation. I toyed with and regretfully discarded the idea of murdering Sharlene in cold blood. I wondered how I could extricate myself from my "relationship" with Gretchen and somehow make it sound like just a big misunderstanding or even a joke when I spoke to Joanie. I had a vision of myself sinking into a huge pile of shit without a

shovel in sight.

I had no idea what to say. God smiled upon me though and I didn't have to say anything. Howard barged in with a goofy macho strut, gave Megan a big hug and boomed, "Give me coffee, woman!"

"What the hell am I, your slave?" She demanded.

The ensuing half serious argument made Megan forget, at least for the moment our previous conversation.

I gulped my coffee and slipped out to look for Joe. I was thinking that it would be good to get an early start. with a good ride or two

we might reach Philadelphia tonight.

The upstairs was crowded with sleeping bags and the going was slow among them. I saw that Gretchen was in one of them and made a *special* effort to be quiet. I needed time to think before I could even say

"good morning" to her.

Joe was, of course, still asleep. I was among the first up and active.

He, like I was one of the lucky ones who had actually gotten a bed rather than a piece of floor, so my sitting on its edge was enough to shake him awake.

"Uhhhhh.....wuthufuck....?"

"Hey man, its eight-thirty. We ought to get on the road."

His puffy eyes opened only slightly. "Eight thirty? You outta yer fuckin' mind? Lemme sleep another hour."

He rolled over in a definitive end to the conversation.

I walked out onto the front porch where I ran into Dudley. He instantly bummed a smoke off of me and we sat down together on the steps.

"Hey, man" he said, "I heard you got it on with Gretchen! Boyoboyoboy, I wouldn't mind being in your shoes. I've tried a couple of times to get close to her."

"It wasn't hard, she came on to me."

"Damn! You get all the luck!"

For some reason, I didn't feel all that lucky. This morning, my life was a time bomb waiting to go off.

"Uh-huh."

"What about Joanie, though? She must be pissed."

"Joanie's cool with it."

He stared at me in awe. "You're with Joanie, who is, like, woah.....*remarkable*....and you can get head from Gretchen, who is just...oh-so-fine...where people can *see* it, and have Joanie be O.K. with it? You are, like, a GOD man!"

"You heard I got *head* from her?"

"Yeah, Brad and Sharlene were giving everyone the *blow by blow*, if ya know what I mean." He smirked. "Sounds like she really has a *handle* on it."

"Shit! Stop it, I'm a *human turd*, man! Joanie thinks I'm about this big." I held my hand six inches from the floor. "Its only a matter of time before she puts me out in the cold, one more fuck up ought to do the job. I have to stay away from Gretchen and even more importantly, I need to keep *her* away from Gretchen."

"Is she mad at Gretchen?"

"No. But if they get a chance to compare notes.....well.....it

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wouldn't be good. Gretchen thinks I'm in love with her."

"Why does she think that? Hey, you got another smoke?"

I passed him a cigarette and said, "Because I said so."

"Why the *fuck* did you do that?" He was dumbfounded. "She came on to you! You didn't have to tell her anything."

I couldn't tell him about my paranoid conception of Sharlene driving me into a stupid lie. "I don't know."

"Do you love her?"

"NO!", I said a little too loudly. "I mean, she's nice, and God knows she's good looking and really sexy, too much so for either her or my good, but she's got nothing in common with me. Not like me and Joanie."

"Well then, my friend, I know what your problem is."

"Oh yeah?" I said suspiciously, "What's that?"

"You fucked up!"

I rolled my eyes and grimaced. "You are a real *fucking genius*, man! Did you figure that out all by yourself, or were you quoting Engels?"

He smiled wryly. "Hey, man, you'll work it out. You were tripping yesterday, your judgment was impaired."

"Its a real leap of faith for you to credit me with any judgment at all. You're a pal." I patted him on the back.

I got up. "I'm going down to the cottage to get my shit."

"Hey! Can you leave me a few weeds?"

I pulled out one cigarette and stuck it behind my ear and threw him the pack with the remaining four smokes in it.

"Thanks, man. Hey, where are you heading?"

"My mom's house for a few days, then Toadstool's place for the rest of the summer. I got a job working on a house up there."

"Hey! I'll come visit you! Tom's mom is a fantastic cook!"

"Yeah, that'd be cool. You ought to come up."

I trotted down to the cottage. Joanie was getting up right when I came in. She looked at me with a contented smile. "G'morning," she said.

I leaned over and kissed her, she had morning breath, but, what the hell.

She said, "You treated me *real* nice last night." She stretched sensuously. "You're *good* when you're guilt ridden."

I tried not to look too uncomfortable. "It wouldn't be my first choice as an aphrodisiac if its all the same to you."

Joanie got up and started pulling on her jeans. "Are you leaving early?"

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"As soon as I can get Joe off his ass."

"When are we getting back together?"

"New York City in September, unless you want to come visit me at Toadstool's." There was another big gathering on Staten Island in September. The Invite to Tom's place was half hearted and she knew it. We wouldn't have any time together there. I would have to work hard to generate enough money to get me through the next few months.

I stuffed my crap into my pack without worrying about wrinkles. I would get my mom to iron the shirts.

Joanie was staying another day so she was just relaxing on the bed watching me pack.

The big problem with me and Joanie was her seeming ability to read my mind.

While I continued to maintain a blasé facade, she was able to sense that something was still wrong.

All I had to do was ignore that she saw through me and I wouldn't have to say anything. Of course, that plan went right down the toilet when Gretchen walked into the cottage and called my name.

"Adam! Where are you?"

My eyes bugged out slightly, but I don't think I actually jumped. Joanie looked curious, but not alarmed. I wanted to rush out to intercept her by the door, but I couldn't figure out how to do it without it looking like I was doing just that.

I love all those movies from the thirties which built their comedy based on moments just like this, but I was really wondering at this point what was so damned funny.

She entered the room talking as she came. "What happened to you last night? I was looking all over....." She saw Joanie lying, still

half dressed on the bed. "Hi Joanie." Her voice wavered slightly.

"He was here, Gretchen." Her attitude was neutral and she didn't move at all. It was clear that she was just waiting to see what happened.

The girl stared at us both with huge watery eyes and just turned and left.

I had my back to Joanie, but I had a pretty good idea of what I expected to see when I turned around. When I did, I found her still sitting impassively but with a much colder expression.

Now was the time to call upon my very best communication skills to clarify the situation for Joanie.

"Um....."

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Her eyes were like cold searchlights illuminating my psyche in crystal clarity. "I think that you had better talk to her." She got up and finished dressing. "You better wait a while before you talk to *me* though." She left the room and I saw her through the window heading up to the house.

I was thoroughly *fucked*. There was no good reason to believe that Joanie would have any interest in being with me in the future and I had no one to blame but myself. One thing was for sure, there was *no way* I could face Gretchen. She was young, she would get over it.

I packed up my shit as quickly as I could. Joe was waking up if he wanted to or not.

An hour later found Joe and I on an entrance ramp with a sign that said "NYC" in big red letters.

I had laid out the entire story for Joe, but I don't think he understood the psychology behind it. He was utterly without guile and was even a little unclear on the concept.

"So I *still* don't get why you said you loved her."

"Because of the townie chick."

"What the hell do you care what *she* thinks?"

"I don't know."

"You are never going to see her again."

"I know."

"She probably didn't care in the first place."

"I know."

"And in the meantime, both Joanie and Gretchen think you're an asshole."

"I know."

"I thought you were smart."

"I am, but not about this stuff."

"No, you're a real idiot about that stuff."

"Yes I am."

"I mean a *real big idiot*."

"I know."

"Really, *really* stupid."

"Alright already!"

We stood in silence for about twenty minutes as the cars zoomed past.

"Dumb." muttered Joe. I grumbled for him to shut up.

Our first ride took us all the way to Nashville. He was a clean-cut looking college student in a big Lincoln, his parents' he said. The

entire ride he pumped us for information about "hippie chicks".

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"What drugs do you give them that make them want to fuck so much?" He asked us. "I'd like to give some to my girlfriend, Jean, to make her want to fuck even a little."

Our answers left him a little disappointed. He was bemused at the notion that they might want to because they like sex.

He wanted to know if we had any grass. Of course, I had learned long ago to never hitch with pot. It was only because it was so easy to hide that I even had the acid.

He seemed like a nice enough guy, but he had a sort of screwed up idea of what my life was like. Well, maybe, at least at the moment, he might have had *my* life pegged, but I was feeling particularly stupid and shallow right then. Most freaks would take offense as I would have at another time. This guy's attitude wasn't that different from Todd, the refrigeration salesman we got a ride from on the way down. Somehow, I was less put off by him than I was by Todd. He only wanted a little more fun in his life. He was working his ass off to get a degree in engineering and was sexually frustrated on top of it. I suspected that he wasn't getting any because she was getting it somewhere else, but I sure didn't want to say *that*.

I knew from experience that lots of straight girls would get down and have really hot nasty sex after only one beer, just so they could claim to have been drunk when it happened. As long as they could avoid responsibility for it, they would do anything.



They were more dangerous to hang out with than freak chicks because they were more prone to do wild and stupid things at the wrong moments. These were the girls who would flash their tits in a supermarket or use you just to piss off their parents. I had at least two girls stop seeing me just as soon as they had the chance to introduce me to their fathers.

I remembered one in particular who had me to dinner at her

parents' place. At the table she told her father she was pregnant by me. We had never even *slept* together. I slipped out during the ensuing screaming match.

All in all, I preferred freak women. They didn't pull shit like that, at least not too often.

"I jack off *all the time*, man! I bet you guys never jack off!"

"Oh, I jack off", said Joe, "How about you Adam, you jack off?"

"Oh yeah, I jack off." Given the situation with Joanie, I suspected it might even be my new hobby.

"Man," said the driver, "if I could get into Jean's pants just once, I'd never jack off again!"

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"Don't *say* that, man!" Said Joe. "Whacking it is a treat all on its own, without any of the possible complications of making it with a woman, right Adam?"

He was teasing me just a little. I smiled *just a little*. "Yep, avoids a whole world of complications."

The dude let us off at a well traveled entrance ramp.

I had given him a few hits of acid. I expected that he would be surprised that they were not an aphrodisiac when he took them. In my experience, sex was *not* enhanced by acid. If anything, it made the whole business hard to concentrate on. Its hard to focus on the whole person when you can get lost in a freckle so easily. I predicted that it might make her more open to the idea of sex, but they might not get around to the deed itself.

There was an overpass almost over our heads which led down to the entrance we were on. We could see lots of trucks coming down it which was a good sign. When we had been there about ten minutes we both saw something which made us doubt our senses.

A fifty foot yacht cruised across the overpass.

"You see that?" Said Joe.

"Even if I had, I wouldn't admit it." I replied.

As it curved down the ramp, we were relieved to see it was being hauled by a tractor and had big "Wide Load" flags hanging off the stern. We were amazed when it pulled over.

The guy at the wheel was about our age and had that crazed speed freak look that was oh-so-common in long distance truckers.

He spoke with a Texas accent.

"Got me a job haulin' this big mama from one ocean to th'other! I ask 'em 'whut about the Panama canal?' and they sez 'can you sail it down there for us?' and I sez 'hell no!' and they sez 'well shut up and *drive* it then' and I sez 'well all right!'"

Which was really about as succinct an explanation as we could

have hoped for. This guy was hoping to finish his run in only three days and get back to Austin in another two to be on time for the birth of his child. My bet was that he was going to sleep through it if he made it there alive at all.

He did all the talking. I knew this guy's life story before too long.

We had lucked out with this one, he was headed for Atlantic city, and the way he drove, we ought to be there by sundown.

Joe decided he wanted to visit a girl in Philly so the guy put him out on the right road and we took to the Jersey turnpike.

I hung around to watch them put the boat into the water and then, decided to take the train into Manhattan.

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It was midnight by the time I reached Penn Station so I shuttled over to Grand Central and slept in a chair until the first train to Rye left at five thirty.

I called my mom who came out to get me before she had to go to work. She dropped me at the house and said she would see me at dinner.

My mom lived alone with three lazy cats who never left the house. They could usually be seen dozing curled up on a shelf or on the couch looking like little fur pillows.

My parents had been divorced for some fifteen years. My father, a Hollywood screen writer, had run off with a Yugoslavian film producer to live in Zagreb. I guess that the whole story is a little bit more complicated, but that's the meat of it. I didn't have that much contact with him, but that was mostly because of distance. I had met his wife, Danuta, and she seemed like a nice lady. I held some resentment toward him because his leaving fucked up my mom's life so much, but the passage of time had healed a lot of those bad feelings. For me, that is, not so much for my mom.

Years later I found out that he blamed my mother for sabotaging his dream of writing the Great American Novel by letting herself get pregnant with me so he had to keep a high paying job.

My older brother was another story. Dad had left when he was thirteen and very sensitive. He never got over it and ended up taking kind of a bad path in life. I had been only five and a lot more adaptable.

My mom now worked as a personnel director for a small printing company in White Plains. She was an *up* kind of person who really endeavored to see the best side of all situations.

Recent problems with my brother, narcotics and the law had put a real strain on her optimism. My brother treated my mom like a steel company treats a strip-mine, leaving a wound when he takes what he needs.

Her passion was the life of the mind. Although she hadn't completed college, she pursued her further education almost as a reflex. She had two or three books she was currently reading in

every room and shelves full of many more lined every available wall. She had particularly strong interests in archaeology and science fiction both of which she had passed on to me.

The full refrigerator and the stacks of books were all I needed to keep me busy when I was in town.

I unpacked my pack and started to pull together a load of laundry. when I found the fifty that Todd the salesman had given me.

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*Excellent.* I hadn't really been around regularly for two years, but I figured I could dig up a connection for some weed.

Among the hundred or so tiny scraps of paper in my wallet, I found Greaser Tony's number.

He still lived in Mamaroneck in his parents' basement and he still had his own phone. He said he could hook me up with a half pound for sixty five, which was all my money, but I was pretty sure that it would be a good investment. In spite of the fact that his "half pounds" usually weighed in at around seven and a half ounces, it was generally good stuff.

In less than an hour he pulled up in front of the house in a beat up Chevy. I'm not sure what year it was, but I think I was in elementary school when it was new.

He eased his way into the house and made himself comfortable on the couch where he was promptly mobbed by the cats. Felines loved Greaser Tony because he always smelled of pot which I think reminded them of catnip.

I found a couple of cans of Gablinger's reduced carbohydrate beer in the 'fridge and tossed one to Tony.

Greaser Tony looked like a skinny biker. His Levi's jacket had the name "Iron Butterfly" painted ornately on the back, a pretty nice job, if I say so myself. I had done it for him a year and a half ago for him in exchange for a dime bag.

My southwestern friends were confused when I referred to guys like Greaser Tony. They had grown up knowing the term "greaser" to apply unflatteringly to Mexicans. I think Tony was Polish.

Around here, when I was going to high school, the social order was determined culturally. The mainstream white kids were the preps and the jocks and what was left over were the blacks, the freaks and the greasers.

The blacks were into their own thing and had their own complex pecking order within the black community. While this was a very integrated area, there still wasn't much cross socialization. When I had been in school, the guy I hung out with most was black, but we ultimately grew apart due to differing social attitudes.

The freaks were the white, dope smoking, liberal social conscience, peace loving, long hair types. They usually came from upper middle class backgrounds.

The greasers were the beer party, petty criminal, sometimes violent, no social conscience types. They usually came from lower middle class backgrounds. In spite of the differences in outlook, there was a strange brotherhood between the freaks and the

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greasers. We were united in our social rejection. While freaks and

greasers rarely socialized, they were also careful not to bother one another. Greasers loved to pick on people, but freaks were hardly ever their victims, they didn't represent the establishment which had rejected them. Freaks hated the cops as much as the greasers did and loved it whenever they got away with something.

Greaser Tony probably delt in more than just grass. I had gotten acid from him on occasion and he had hinted that he could get anything I wanted. I didn't ask. Cocaine never did a thing for me and I drew the line at needles and pills. It was as simple as that.

Tony pulled out a large plastic bag full of crunchy green/brown pot. It looked like it was just a big chunk knocked off of a kilo brick. He pulled out a scale and showed me it weighed a full eight ounces. I looked it over and estimated in my head that about an ounce was made up of seeds and stems, which wasn't as bad a ratio as I had seen in some bags.

Tony rolled a fat joint right out of the bag and fired it up. A seed exploded sounding like a capgun as he took the first deep inhale. He held the toke and passed the reefer to me. I liked the flavor of the stuff, sweet and resinous. It gave a mellow, sort of "lifting" high. I was *definitely* keeping a full ounce of this for myself.

"Very nice!" I said.

"Yeah, got it from some boneheads over in Jersey. It was cheap 'cause they got it outta the car of a pimp what got waxed. Worked out pretty good for everyone 'cept th'pimp." He chuckled.

When Tony said "boneheads", he was referring to blacks. "Pimp" in his book was not necessarily someone who sold the favors of women. It could just mean a flashy, high living black man. "Waxed" was murdered by organized criminals for internal political reasons. Frequently the crime was talking to a rival organization or the cops. If that was the case, all of the shots would be through the mouth of the waxee. They always made a point of leaving victims with a full wallet and all their possessions. If some enterprising scavenger got there before the police, they could do very well indeed, but it was risky because the mob didn't like it.

Thank God that wasn't *my* world.

It always gave me the creeps to hear Tony talk so casually about

people getting murdered. I have no idea if he really felt like it was no big deal or if he just acted that way to impress people.

I tried not to think about it and handed the cash over to Tony who then tossed me a couple of joints of different pot.

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"I got a little nice Colombian from a spade in White Plains. Not enough to sell though so I been just handing out a joint or two to good customers. Kinda' like a prize in th' Cracker Jack."

"Thanks, man."

I'd hang onto those to bring up to Toadstool's.

After Tony left I pulled out my address book and started calling all the local dopers I knew. In forty minutes I had made enough appointments to move all I had. It wasn't going to be a real high profit transaction for me, but I would double my money and do it in one day.

I took a full ounce of fine shake off the top for myself and then made up four "lid" sized bags, six "dime" sized bags and a handful of nickels and joints from what was left.

My sturdy old Schwinn was still in the basement and, with the help of a patch on the front tire, soon had me on the road. By four p.m., I had moved everything except one of the ounce bags and a couple of joints. I had one hundred thirty five bucks in my pocket and I could sit on that last bag. I put them and my personal bag of shake into my pack inside a "Top" tobacco tin.

If I ended up having to hitch with it, I could go and buy some tobacco to cover it up with and seal the tin. A little risky but not a bad enough bet to make me *real* nervous.

Those precautions turned out to be unnecessary. I called Toadstool and found out he was coming down to Yonkers the next day to get a set of tires for his Volkswagen. A friend of his was going to just give them to him.

He said I could come back to Norwalk with him which was great. It was a couple of days earlier than I expected to head up there but it would give me some time to relax before they started framing the house next Monday.

Cool. Things were coming together. I ran out to buy some beer to replace what I had drunk of Mom's Gablinger's as well as some Miller High Life for myself.

Around five thirty, my mom came home and we finally got a chance to talk. We hadn't seen each other in three weeks. Although this was more or less my home base, I hadn't spent much time here since I got out

of high school.

Mom was a pistol. There were few people more fun to just *talk* to than her. If there was a single person responsible for shaping me

intellectually, it was Mom. She tolerated, sometimes even celebrated, my gypsy lifestyle. All she ever wanted to know was what I had been *reading*. She really didn't care to see me become a

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doctor or a businessman and I think she might have been horrified

if I had become a lawyer. She had stressed creativity and had been delighted when I showed a talent for painting. Unlike so many parents, she looked at my long hair and anti-authoritarian attitude as a sign that she had done something *right*.

She was disappointed to hear I would be leaving the next day, but we had a jolly evening together in which we talked about family, art, politics and books while she beat me twice at Scrabble. Somewhere in there she made a wonderful meatloaf.

She went to bed around ten and I stayed up to watch Johnny and then a great old monster movie. I fell asleep during the movie only to be roused by the national anthem just long enough to turn off the set.

I did nothing of importance the entire next day until Tom showed up around two. At the last minute I decided to take the Schwinn which we had to lash to the roof with clothesline.

On the drive to Norwalk I asked Tom about Brad and Sharlene.

"I don't know what he saw in her." said Tom, "She just seemed rude and vulgar to me. Am I terrible for saying that?"

"Fuck no. She *really* rubbed me the wrong way."

"Damn. I thought I was the only one. You know, after you and Joe left, her husband showed up looking for her."

"***Husband?***"

"Yeah. Isn't that something? He wanted to beat up Brad. You should have see Brad! He'll deny it, but he was *really* scared! She finally just went away with the guy. I bet he beat *her* up."

"Man....that just figures. Y'know, she made me so *antsy* that I ended up screwing things up between me and Joanie." I told him the whole story. Tom was the only person I told everything to including my internal motivations. To my surprise, he understood completely.

"You think you're going to be able to fix things up with Joanie?"

"I don't know. I look like a pretty big asshole to her right now. I'm going to wait a few days to call her.

Give her a chance to relax about it."

"I'm not sure that's the thing to do."

"What do you mean?"

"Women want you to call even if they don't want to talk to you. If you don't give her the chance to hang up on you at least once, you're not letting her go through the complete cycle of forgiving you."

"That's stupid! Where the hell did you get that?"

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"Some psychology text book from the barn." The "barn" Tom referred to was an big old shed down near the driveway which the family had never used. Tom had filled it with stuff he had scavenged, mostly car parts, but he had bought a huge store of books that the local library had removed from their shelves and were going to become mulch. He got a whole pallet full for ten bucks. Since then he had spent quite a bit of time just reading his way through the pile. Last I checked he was about a fifth of the way through.

"You're going to have to show me the book." It would never happen. the chances of him being able to find the same book twice were *exceedingly* small. Maybe I would try and call Joanie tonight anyway. I figured I had nothing to lose.

This guy's passion for reading came after the discovery late in his academic career of a learning disability. It wasn't until the middle of his senior year of high school that his problem was identified. His teachers and councilors had more or less given up on him and he had graduated through heroic effort somewhere near the bottom of his class. Since then he had devoted himself to books. He would simply take as much time as it took to get through each one without the pressure of being in school and having to turn in a paper at a given time.

This was the thing about Tom, he was slow, but he wasn't anything *like* stupid.

Tom's place was at the top of hill at the end of a dirt road. It was actually paved up until about one hundred feet from the house where the blacktop ended suddenly. A tiny sign next to the mailbox announced "Here 'tis".

His mother was working in a little flower garden By the front door and called a greeting to us.

The Grovers were in their early sixties. Tom was their only child who had come to them quite late in the game. They were great and lively folks. I was happy to say that I liked them and they liked me.

Tom's father, who was a master carpenter, had built a little A-frame structure in the back yard to be my temporary quarters while I was here for the job. The walls were made from heavy clear plastic sheeting. Some sort of military surplus no doubt. I had previously thought that I would have it to myself, but Toadstool had decided to stay out there as well just to be out of the house. The plastic was in several layers that rippled and trapped moisture so that the walls were not exactly transparent, they just weren't

exactly *not* transparent either. My first order of business was to

hang some Indian patterned cotton cloth I got from Pier-1 on the inside.

We had electricity out there and therefore a stereo and a little hotel room sized 'fridge which we filled with beer, so we were as comfortable as we needed to be.

Tom's folks had a hyperactive whippet named Betty who seemed to be capable of being in two or more places at once. You could see her digging on the other side of the yard and then turn around and trip over her a half second later. It was unnerving at first, but I got used to it. I got into telling people that the dog could teleport from one place to another without having to cross the intervening space. The only way to prove me wrong would be to keep eyes on her every second, because if you blinked, she would be somewhere else.

In the yard next to the house were the three cars and one truck which Tom was currently working on. At the moment, only the Rambler was running but the VW would be fine once he got the new tires on. As soon as he did, he was going to sell it to Brad for a hundred bucks and a pile of parts for a Mustang which he also had.

I called Joanie and got her roommate who didn't know where she was. She told me she had gotten back to town earlier in the day, but was out now. I left a message just to tell her I had called.

Over the weekend, Tom and I worked on the A-frame to make it a little more homey, cut down a couple of trees for Mister Grover and repaired a low brick wall around the back yard garden. We called up Brad on Saturday evening and went out to drink beer and shoot pool.

Tom and Brad knew a great bar down near Danbury which had a big copper topped bar with brass rails and five big pool tables. It was an eclectic place, drawing both businessmen and more working class types. The local motorcycle club also frequented the place but in spite of their menacing appearance, there was never any trouble from them. Actually, these were the guys who we were always giving us the best games and they would frequently be a source of auto parts for Tom and Brad. One thing about this place was that car culture ruled. I'm positive that I was the only regular customer they ever had who, not only didn't own more than one vehicle, but actually didn't drive.

So for Brad and Tom the evening was one of drinking beer and yacking about cars while I spent my time shooting pool with bikers.

Really an altogether pleasant time.

We rolled back into Norwalk around two a.m. only slightly drunk. Tom knew these roads and knew how not to stand out, so I found

that we never got stopped by the cops once in my entire time in

Connecticut in spite of Tom driving around "half in the bag" as he so poetically put it.



On Monday morning, just as we were getting ready to head out to the job site, Tom got a call from the foreman. The customer had asked the architect to make changes just a day before framing was to begin. The job was postponed for what could easily turn into the rest of the summer.

Tom and I both agreed that the situation sucked. I decided to stick it out for a few weeks to see if the job was going to materialize and would pick up temp work in the meanwhile.

Tom got a full time job at a place which made medals and commemorative coins. Sort of like the Franklin Mint, only less well known.

I went down to the local Manpower office to pick up day labor. Manpower was this place where you would see a bunch of guys, some of them young like me, but most were older guys with "loser" written all over them. We would all hang out sipping bad free coffee and eating not-so-bad free donuts while the dispatcher would receive calls and post the days work.

The other guys entertained themselves by telling me about the horrible jobs they sent new guys on, most of it made up.

Chester, this skinny middle-aged black guy who's eyes pointed in different directions, claimed that he got sent to clean up after a multi-car accident. He described in vivid and gorey detail, the bloody scene. Another guy insisted that he had once been sent to wash out bed pans at an old folks home.

"Why don'y you guys shut the hell up?" Said the dispatcher. "Listen up kid, we don't send guys out on jobs like that, but if you stick with us long enough, you might find yourself wishing for something that interesting."

That Tuesday, I was sent to a local magnetic tape factory to cut the unhealthy looking, plastic strewn lawn behind the building. It apparently had never been cut before. The anemic yellow grass had formed over the years into a landscape of humps and hollows. This wasn't going to be a matter of pushing mowers around. Me and Bob, my companion who smelled of cheap wine, were handed scythes to take care of the thick, almost peat-like growth.

I had done my share of yard work over the years and, while the work was a *huge* pain-in-the-ass, it could be handled. I was worried about Bob, though. He complained bitterly about even having to lift the scythe. I slowly and painfully covered an area

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starting near an unused back loading dock while Bob started near

the fence on the other side. I saw him stop frequently to smoke or just to sit down. His clear area only seemed to grow in tiny increments.

The janitor who was our supervisor for the day wandered out a few times to see what was taking so long. Finally, sometime around eleven, he sent Bob on his way, leaving me to finish on my own. "He wasn't up to it", said the janitor. "Said he thought his heart was gonna pop."

At noon, I got to go to the factory lunchroom to get a baloney and mayonnaise sandwich out of a vending

machine. The factory smelled strongly of a weird cocktail of chemicals. Right by the back where I had been working were two huge steel tanks that were used to store acetone. The tanks sunk halfway into the floor and went about thirty feet down and the walkway through allowed me to see inside. They were empty now but there was no shortage of fumes. There was a green jumpsuited guy with a mop cleaning the inside of one while standing on something like a window washer's scaffold. In spite of the density of acetone fumes, he had a lit cigar gripped in his teeth. I hurried past not wanting to be there for the seeming inevitable.

I spent the rest of the day slashing grass and discovering the strange archeology of the tape factory. Here there would be a stack of fifty-five gallon drums filled with God-knows-what but whatever it was it was leaking and stank. There a pile of giant reels of weather distressed one inch recording tape. A survey of local trees showed that this was a preferred bird nest material. Some of the nests had obviously stood the ravages of several seasons. Some even looked as if they had been plundered to make newer nests by other birds.

At five, the lawn was only two thirds done. The Janitor asked me to come back the next day to finish up. I decided to let Manpower send someone else the following day. My hands were blistered because I had forgotten Manpower's policy about workers providing their own work gloves. Besides the luck of the draw might give me a better job the next day.

Something interesting turned up the next morning.

I was sent out with a crew of guys to build a tennis court at a country club. It was like a drama which unfolded step by step. I had no idea how the building of the court worked so everything was a little surprise.

When we got there the small square of land had already been

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leveled.

I was immediately put to work holding the end of a string while the more experienced members of the crew used the other end to mark the line where the mold would go. Then I was sent out with a double handled tool with something like a parrot's beak on the end to dig post holes at a number of locations which had been marked inside the strings.

After lunch, all of our trash went into one of the holes. I was told that it was going to be entombed in concrete for the life of the court. I was intrigued enough to write a little note and shove it into my Orange Crush bottle. It said "Hello to the future! -Adam Rosenfeld, July 26th 1974." Whoever found it would know I once existed, and that I said 'hello'. For years afterward, I would be tormented that I hadn't written something more substantive.

After lunch we set up a mold which was nothing more than a one foot wall of a single layer of plywood built in the exact position of the strings. It was about four o'clock by then, so we just set a few of the posts. This was done by just sticking a metal post into one of the holes which seemed much too wide for it and hanging a plumb bob down beside it to make sure it was straight. A few gallons of mixed concrete was poured around the base and allowed to set. After that the remainder of the hole was filled in with dirt. We

did three of these including the one which was filled with our trash by quitting time.

This one, I would see through. The next day, we set the rest of the posts and a mixer was brought in to pour a slab of concrete which halfway filled the mold. We had to let the slab set so most of the rest of the day was spent shooting the breeze and smoking cigarettes.

These guys were the most laid back crew I had ever worked with. I didn't even know why I had been hired on. When I asked, they told me that one of their guys had gotten married and was on his honeymoon this week. We had a crew of five and so far, this had looked like a two or three man job.

The final stage was on Friday when we laid out many bags of a greenish gray gritty substance inside the mold. We walked around ripping the bags with garden hoes and raising huge clouds of scratchy dust which crept into every pore and orifice. It would be weeks before the last of that grit was out of my hair, beard and clothing. I now knew why three of the guys wore their hair very short and the one other long hair on the crew wore something like a shower cap when we did this particular process. We fished the

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heavy craft paper bags out of the ankle deep grit and then leveled the entire thing by running a long board along the top of the mold. then we stood around the perimeter with hoses and sprayed water on it for almost an hour. The water filled the surface with more craters than the moon but no one seemed too concerned. after some time the surface smoothed all on its own and took on a dark green color. In a short time it hardened into a just ever so slightly bouncy surface.

We trimmed the edge and took down the mold. leaving something which looked like a big rectangular cake with dark green icing.

The other guy would be back Monday so I wouldn't get to be around for marking the surface or setting up the fence but that was o.k., I was ready to move on to something else.

Who knew what wonder Manpower would yeid up next?

In the evenings, Toadstool would tell me what it was like at the medal works. Everything was formed in powerful punch presses, from punching out the blanks to the final striking of the image.

Tom told me that no one who had worked there more than a year had all of their fingers. He said the old guy who trained everyone was missing the middle and ring finger of his right hand with sort of a bite shaped scoop taken out where the knuckles would have been.

I actually saw a lot of these mutilations with my own eyes when I met Tom for Lunch one day. Rumor was that the company compensated victims of the accidents so well that some might have allowed them to happen on purpose.

During this time, life took on an easy, if unexciting, rhythm with a new dull job every day. I got pretty familiar with the industrial life of Norwalk but never was a part of it.

I had several emotionally cool conversations with Joanie over the phone, but I sensed that things were warming slightly. In spite of what Tom had said, she never hung up on me. If I could just curb my

tendency toward supernatural stupidity, things might get back to where they were with her. She at least had said that she looked forward to seeing me in New York.

Complicating things were frequent calls from Gretchen who made a point of inviting me to Boston every time we spoke. She also made sure to tell me she had forgiven me for sleeping with Joanie, completely unclear that I had cheated on Joanie with *her* and not the other way around. It was a simple failure of courage which kept me from stating plainly and baldly that I was uninterested in a relationship with her and she was unresponsive

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to anything more subtle. Also complicating things was the fact that I *did* find her very attractive. She said she would come to Norwalk if I wanted and I was quick to explain (read *lie*) that I was unable to have guests where I was.

Howard was also inviting me to Boston. He thought that I would find it a good environment for an artist up there. I admit that it was pretty tempting to go somewhere where I might be able to paint and sell my work. I would end up putting a lot of time into thinking about that possibility.

On Friday of my second week in Norwalk, Dudley came to stay with me and Toadstool in the A-frame. We called up Brad who wanted to go to the club down in Danbury and have a few.

Brad had finally gotten the VW and repainted it so he wanted to drive. It was a slightly drizzly night and we almost put off going in favor of hanging out and smoking dope, but Brad *insisted* we hit the road.

The little Beetle was crowded with the four of us and we couldn't open the windows because of the rain.

Tom was in the front with Brad because he was the biggest of the lot of us. Me and Dudley were crammed into the back seat which wouldn't have been so bad except for the fact that he was farting almost constantly as a result of something he had eaten at a truckstop while hitch hiking down.

Brad had an eighteen inch piece of rebar on the shift console that he told us he kept "just in case".

The rain did nothing but get worse as we headed for the bar. We whiled away several hours drinking and socializing. I found that Dudley and I were more or less evenly matched at pool which made for some interesting games. We heckled each other mercilessly as we played and tried to jinx each other's shots.

By last call there was an amazing downpour outside. Rain was coming down in sheets. It was so loud that it drowned out all other sound as much as it drowned the land. We all got soaked in the fifty foot dash to the car and squeezed our soggy asses inside the tiny bug. Luck was with us so far as the roads were fairly empty. Most people had more sense than to be out driving tonight.

Brad was getting uptight trying to make his way down the road with almost zero visibility. Tom kept giving him advice which he did his best to ignore.

The Still river flowed through a channel right near the underpass we had to go through to reach the highway.

Tom told Brad to find another route but he kept right on going.

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"The underpass will be fine." He said.

"No, man", Said Tom, "there's too much rain, the river's gonna flood."

"Shut the fuck up. I've done this a thousand times. You just gotta hit it fast and straight and you wont wrap up."

We headed down to the underpass. It didn't look too bad, maybe six inches of water. The bug hit with a big splash and we suddenly slowed way down and started drifting sideways, our wheels no longer in contact with the road.

Tom was screaming at Brad. "You fucking ***moron***! We're a boat now!"

We were floating like a cork although we wouldn't be able to for very long. Water was squirting through the door seams, wetting down our legs and feet.

Dudley opened the window and stuck his head out. The water level was just below the windows. "Damn, I wonder how deep the water is?" He said.

Before anyone could say anything, for no reason that made *any* sense, Dudley opened the door.

A couple of hundred gallons of water poured into the little car filling it to chest level in less than a second as we sunk like the proverbial rock.

"About four and a half feet, you asshole!" I said to Dudley.

Tom flipped out. "I'm drowning! **I'm drowning**!" He yelled.

Brad picked up the rebar and hit him on the shoulder with it.

"Shut up!" he snapped.

"AHHHHHH! You fucker! You hit me!"

"Shut up! SHUT UP! **SHUT UP!**" he was now hitting Tom repeatedly between the shoulders with the rebar.

Me and Dudley piled out of the car followed by Toadstool and Brad who immediately started punching each other.

The river current was actually flowing through the underpass and was strong enough to slam the car against the metal rail along its stone and cinder block wall where it came to rest. I waded over and felt around inside until I found and pulled the emergency break. Hopefully it would keep the car from moving further as long as its wheels were in contact with the pavement.

Dudley and I waded up the grade until we were only ankle deep and looked back at the half sunken car and the unseemly spectacle of Tom and Brad trying to punch each other's lights out. Tom was bigger and stronger than Brad but Brad was meaner and still had

the rebar in his hand.

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Me and Dudley *very carefully* got between them. I backed Tom up trying to calm him down. He stumbled and momentarily vanished beneath the surface.

When he emerged a few seconds later he was sputtering but a little calmer.

It took a little while, but we convinced them to walk up to higher ground.

The rain was still coming down hard but we were protected by the bridge. Another car approaching stopped before it hit the water and the guy inside got out and asked if we were alright. After explaining the situation to him he pulled out some rope and with a lot of pushing and pulling, we got the VW out of the drink.

It wouldn't start of course.

Brad had to take out the distributor cap and carefully dry it out by shaking it free of liquid water and then cooking it over the running engine of the other guy's car.

Astonishingly, there was no water in the lines. A minor miracle actually, seeing as how low the Volkswagen motor is placed on the chassis. The entire thing was completely submerged for several minutes. With the now dry distributor, the car turned over on the second try.

Tom and Brad were not speaking as we headed back. I didn't know at the time that they had been through about a dozen incidents like this in the past, so I was assuming that the events of this night were a deal breaker so far as their friendship was concerned.

Brad dropped us off in silence and when we got back to the A-frame, and had wrung ourselves out, I looked over Tom's back to make sure that Brad hadn't broken any of his ribs. I couldn't even find a bruise, that guy was made of tough stuff.

I carefully dried out my cigarettes over the light bulb so Dudley and I could have a smoke. The butts were all splotchy looking and tasted terrible, but that didn't stop us from smoking several.

We all slept soundly that night and woke to a morning which showed little sign of the storm.

Dudley left that Sunday to head for Boston. I guess there was some sort of commie demonstration at Harvard or something and he wanted to be in on it. He also had promised to get some of his red buddies to paint his parents' house on the cheap.

This guy was so *weird*. He preached this heavy statist philosophy, but it wasn't like he was even disciplined enough to actually hold a job himself in spite of all his boosting of the

"workers". This group he identified as the workers never seemed to include anyone he knew who actually had a job and disagreed with him. Someone like that was a "lackey", not a "worker". The other thing about his brand of communists was that they all hated one another and having more than two in a room together was an instant argument over the fine points of dialectical materialism or some shit like that. They all had their pet philosophers who they would fight over the superiority of. Dudley sung the praises of Mao-tse-tung while he all but spat on the positions of Trotsky and Stalin. Lately he had developed a warm spot in his heart for Enver Hoxa. He was clearly insane, but still a great guy to hang out with.

I called Joanie that night. *Wings* answered the phone causing an ice cold lump to form in the pit of my stomach.

"Adam! Dude! *Que pasa?* Hey that acid was pretty good, ya gonna have more in New York? I hope ya do, man, 'cause I wanna try just *one more* hit before I decide if I wanna buy any."

Jesus, he could piss me off just by opening his mouth. "Uh....I dunno, man. Can you put Joanie on?"

When Joanie got on the line she said that he was in town visiting her room mate, but I couldn't help but wonder if that was the truth or not. I didn't really have any reason to think otherwise seeing as she had always been up front about other guys in the past, but somehow it all felt different now. At that time I didn't even have the mental equipment to deal with the kind of things I felt. It was like , the closer I felt to Joanie, the more I felt *compelled* to behave like a total asshole.

As I relaxed a little, we were able to have a pleasant conversation and she seemed happy that we would be getting together in New York. She wanted to go to the Botanical Gardens with me which sounded like a good opportunity to spend time with her without distractions.

By the time we hung up, my insecurities were minimized, but I was still on alert.

The following Monday, one of Tom's coworkers lost a fingertip as he operated a press right beside him. Tom was one of those guys who was seriously spooked by the sight of blood and also feared his number would be up sooner rather than later, so he quit on the spot. The part of the whole thing that I found the strangest was that this was the *third time* this particular guy had been caught in the press. They hadn't even cleaned up the blood by the time Tom was out of there. I think he got home before the guy reached the hospital.

So with Tom unemployed and me only doing day labor, we were free as birds to do as we pleased. I suggested that he might want to go up to Boston to see Howard and maybe also see if Dudley wanted to add a couple of hippies to the all commie painting crew.

This is when he surprised me by instantly calling up Brad and suggesting a road trip. This just flipped me out on a couple of

levels. First was that they were still talking to one another. Second that Brad was willing to leave his job to run off to Boston for God-knows-what-or-how-long.

Brad worked at a robot factory assembling servos, solenoids and the like. This stuff became the automated machinery for assembly lines all over the world. He didn't feel bad about quitting because he figured he would be out of a job as soon as they figured out how to make a robot to make other robots anyway.

By Wednesday we had made all the phone calls and set everything up to leave the next morning. Tom and I had only about ninety bucks between us, but I had scored another quarter pound which I could turn into cash in Beantown. Brad had something like twelve hundred dollars because he had cashed out his pension plan from the robot works and sold a beat up camper trailer he had.

I couldn't believe his stupidity. Not only had he quit a job that had accumulated that much pension when he was only twenty three years old, but that he chose to carry it all with him in cash.

What a *nitwit*. If a normal person were to do this I would assume that he had some sort of master plan for the future. Not so in Brad's case. He had done stuff like this in the past just for the hell of it. He was a member of a union and always kept up on his dues so he claimed he could get work anywhere, anytime.

I was thinking that I might possibly extend my stay in Boston for a while. Howard knew about a restaurant in Cambridge that was looking to hire artists to work on a large mural which would decorate both the inside and outside of the place. He had already spoken to the owner on my behalf without my having asked and he wanted to meet me. He wasn't paying a lot, but it would be a large and visible piece of work I could point to which might just possibly make my reputation as an artist. Maybe not. Hell, it would be something to kill a little time with.

Tom had his cap set for a girl who worked at a vegetarian eatery, also in Cambridge who he wanted to try to spend some time with.

Evidently this place, the "Vegetable King", was a noted freak hangout.

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It was weird. We were suddenly set for an exodus to Boston that

had materialized in a few days. Tom and I loaded up the Rambler and Brad decided to take the VW. We were going directly to Dudley's mom's place where we would be able to stay for a week while she was on vacation. The place was supposed to get painted in that time and we would each get fifty dollars.

Thankfully, the trip to Boston was uneventful save for Brad getting pulled over for a broken turn signal lamp. It turned out that the plastic cover was filled with water causing the light to short out. Brad told the cop he had no idea how that had happened but promised to get it fixed right away. It wouldn't be the last little pocket of water that would be found in that car over the next month.

Dudley and Jason's mom lived in Concord, the town famous for being on route Paul Revere's midnight ride. The residents of the town along with those of neighboring Lexington made sure that you couldn't forget it.



Something that I would notice everywhere I went in the Boston area (which those who lived there were fond of referring to as "The Hub", meaning literally the hub of the universe) I would see these God damned little bronze plaques commemorating some historical event or another.

Granted, this region had an illustrious past, but the good citizens of the area seemed obsessed by it. There were many neighborhoods which had building codes which enforced earlier styles of architecture and public art. There were whole clubs devoted to the preservation of history about one particular event or person. Sometimes even to commemorate events which *never* happened.

I grew up around the city of New York which had been settled even longer than Boston and had an equally impressive past and yet the people of that region seemed to live against the background of that history with greater comfort. New Yorkers seemed to be more about today and the future while surrounded by the heritage of the peculiar Dutch and Indian place names. In New England everything was much more *English*. These people, who prided themselves so much on their ancestor's part in our nation's foundation, seemed to preserve just that much more of the culture of our former masters. So go figure.

Dudley's mom's place was a fine old house from the pre- depression era with peeling paint. There was no question that this was going to be a real job.

The commies had bought all the paint and supplies before we

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had arrived. In order to save as much of the paint money as they

could, they bought some really cheap brand of paint. The less they spent on paint, the more money would be left to augment the pay of "the workers". "Sparkle" brand paint was kind of thin and smelled weird, as if it had dead frogs, burnt rubber, corn flakes and sour milk as prominent ingredients. Tom, who had worked as a painter, was disgusted. Seeing a job get done half-assed was like a personal insult to him.

"We're going to have to use four coats of this stuff! I bet we don't even have enough here to do the job!" He said.

He had a long talk with the guys and finally got them to take the paint back and buy some "Dutch Boy". It turned out that not one of these guys had any experience painting or at a whole lot else in the working world. They were nice enough fellows, but they were not *workers*, they were bookish student types. I tell you, watch out for guys who spend a lot of time talking about "the workers" who themselves don't have jobs.

After the "Sparkle" incident, Tom became sort of the default foreman and put everyone to work scraping until all the loose paint chips decorated the lawn and hedges in a ring around the house.

We spent the evening drinking beer and watching "Star Trek" reruns on the big color TV in the house. A local station ran two episodes back to back every day. I never really liked that show, Captain Kirk always reminded me of one of those snotty, pith helmeted British colonialist guys. Dudley's pals livened up the viewing with an ongoing Marxist commentary.

This Marxist spin thing was a favorite sport with these guys. No media, no matter how innocent, escaped

being analyzed in terms communist theory. Captain Kirk was the tip of the iceberg, you should have seen how they tied into Donald Duck comics!

No matter how critical they were of everything else, their greatest vitriol was reserved for each other. It took me a while to catch onto the fact that terms like "bourgeois" and "revisionist" were the dirtiest words that they could think of. That I wasn't clear on the exact meaning of these words in the context they used them didn't matter, they reacted to their use as if they had been called "bastard" or "motherfucker".

The painting job took us through the weekend with only a few mishaps, the worst of which was about half a can of paint getting spilled on Brad's car by one of the guys who got clumsy. When Brad insisted that the guy wash his car, he got a lecture about how he couldn't "enslave" the "workers". His car got washed only after

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he loudly wondered if he could beat the shit out of the workers while he waved his "just in case" rebar in the perpetrator's face.

On Monday only a few finishing touches needed to be done and I decided to take the day off. Howard lived just a few blocks from Cambridge city hall and I figured a visit would make a nice day trip.

After making my way through a few town roads, I thumbed my way up route nine which was sort of a Jersey style strip leading into Beantown. At one point there was a trolley station right near the road called "Newton Highlands". From there, for the price of a quarter, I headed into town.

The trolley was a sort of pop up toaster shaped affair of a dark green color although it seemed to be a few years from its last paint job. The little car chugged its way through the pleasant suburban landscape and I found myself musing over what a nice way to travel this was. My reverie was shattered when we entered a tunnel and suddenly the experience seemed much more like the New York subway. This was my first experience with the oldest subway system in the United States.

We finally rolled into a enormous station called Park Street where I had to switch to the other train called the Red Line. To my eye, the look of everything was out of a movie from the forties. All of the fixtures were of an older style than the equivalent in New York

City.

To get from one platform to the other, I had to use a narrow and ancient escalator with wooden steps fashioned into tooth like shapes. They interlocked neatly as they leveled off and disappeared beneath the bottom grating.

Looking around this station, I remembered a short story by H.P. Lovecraft about a crazed artist who lived on Beacon Hill and had made a very haunting painting of commuters on a Boston subway platform being attacked by some unholy night creatures. It was easy to see where he might have gotten such ideas. The grimy tunnels seemed to be the perfect place to shelter some nameless, shambling horror from the dark abyss of prehistory.

The train itself was obviously at least three decades old. The glossy red and gray paint which covered all of

the aging metal was lumpy from the layers of previous years lying beneath giving its surface a Moon like topography.

The Red Line train hurtled out of the station and to my surprise into the light. We were on an ancient bridge with short stone towers at a few points along it resembling chess pieces. The skyline

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of Boston was revealed in a lovely panorama that could not have

been better had the view been planned. The city was so much *lower* than New York or Chicago or even Hartford or Pittsburgh. The vast majority of buildings reached to three stories but the exceptions were impressive.

There was one structure which must have been consciously designed to be as phallic as possible with a constriction followed by a knob at the top. It was called Prudential center. The other major skyscraper was somewhat distressed looking. A huge slab about the same size and shape as New York's Pan Am building covered in reflective windows although many of the windows seemed to be missing and replaced with rough plywood. Some appeared not to have been replaced at all which led me to think that the loss of windows must be an ongoing process. Vandals perhaps? I found out later that this building was actually the victim of a design flaw which caused it to drop its windows with fair regularity. Apparently it took several years to correct.

Again we dove beneath the Earth after the brief revelation of the city. The second stop after that was mine. Central Square. The heart of the city of Cambridge. Again, it looked like I had been transported back in time. Most of the buildings seemed to date from the turn of the century and the neighborhood was strangely worn down in places exposing layers from years gone by. Broken pieces of street surface revealed abandoned trolley tracks which had been paved over, peeling paint on buildings showed decades (centuries?) of changing tastes.

Howard lived down a narrow street which ran past a junk yard surrounded by a chain link fence. The place was stacked with hundreds of car parts. A tower of chrome bumpers gleamed in the sun. Toadstool would see this place as a little piece of Heaven.

Howard's was one of a long row of houses built on more or less the same plan. A three story oblong with a flat roof and bay

windows on the front, a design referred to by locals as a "triple decker". Virtually every city dwelling hereabouts was some variation of this basic design.

The name "Flanders" was calligraphed in blackletter type on a weathered piece of paper taped to the ground floor apartment's mailbox. I heard Charley Parker from inside and assumed I had the right place. I rang the bell.

Howard, who was ever so slightly bug-eyed to begin with bugged out his eyes even more when he caught sight of me from his front

window.

He flung open the door and hollered, "Adam! How the fuck are you? What weird shit are you up to, man? C'mon in! I have a record you *must* hear!" He seized my shirt and pulled me inside.

In a matter of seconds I was in a crowded but comfortable living room sipping some strange herbal tea and eating a slice of supermarket blueberry pie.

The room was dominated by a complex stereo system which occupied a central position like some sort of shrine to an electronic god. On it was a strange, wonderful record.

"This piece is called 'Four winds'.....amazing!" It truly was. The record was by some guy named Dave Holland. The track that really got my attention was called "Conference of the Birds", which wasn't really like anything I had ever heard before. Melodic.... sensual...organic...original...wondrous.

He loaded up a peculiar looking water pipe made from grayish stoneware. It looked more like the unnatural offspring from the mating of a plumbing fixture with some sort of primitive musical instrument rather than a smoking implement. He called it a "canabiphone". It did the job of delivering potent hits of strong but cool pot smoke very efficiently. The only problem was that it had this round bottom so you couldn't put it down until you were done smoking and could dump the water out.

He then pulled out some Sun Ra and turned it up.

Shortly after the Pharoah from Saturn began to enjoin us to be of his spaceworld, I heard a thumping down the outside stairs and a pounding on the door.

"Shit." Said Howard, "It's Theodoros."

He opened the door to face a huge and sweaty man in a tank undershirt. He pointed a finger of ultimate accusation at Howard.

"Hyou boyz.....hyou boyz muszt *stop* jazz! Turn down! *Turn down!* Muszt work night! I *Sleep* now!"

"Sorry Theodoros, I'll turn it down!"

The giant Greek stalked back up the stairs muttering. "Bad, loud *crazy* boyz!"

Howard shrugged. "You should see how he reacts when Jeff plays his 'Who' records. Talk about Greek drama!" He twisted his face into a pretty good imitation of Theodoros's glower. "Rock-roll!" He mocked, "Rock-roll! Why muszd it be so **loud**!??? Hyou make whole house **exzplode**!!!" He broke up laughing. "Well, at least he knows the difference between rock and jazz."

Jeff was Howard's room mate who I had never met. I wouldn't

today either, he was out of town.

"He get us back, you know." Howard informed me. "On summer evenings he sits in the front yard playing dominos with his brother listening to badly recorded tapes of bazouki music and sipping retsina. I should thank him. My mother once came to visit when they were hanging out and they got up and started dancing and then got into a fist fight. She hasn't been back since."

I knew Howard's mom, she taught psychology at a state university. She was nice enough, but kind of fussy and judgmental. She had a way of sucking the fun out of any situation by over analyzing it. Howard liked to take life in big gulps and that tended to worry Doctor Augusta Flanders.

"Gussie" smoked a little dope from time to time and thought that she was a free wheeling hipster, but was *very* uncomfortable around working class people, particularly ones who cursed drunkenly in foreign languages.

"Yeah, I bet the professor found that way unseemly!" I laughed trying to imagine the scene.

"Look, man", said Howard, "Lets go down to Harvard Square. I'll get you some Arabic coffee!"

"Arabic coffee?"

"Highly caffinated mud!" he exclaimed with glee.

It was another, but much shorter subway ride. Only one stop to legendary Harvard Square.

The first thing I saw was a huge collection of buildings made from identical ivy covered red brick surrounded by a wrought iron fence penetrated regularly by brick and concrete arches.

"Whazzat?"

"Harvard University. That's why they call it 'Harvard Square'."

"Hmmm. Clever."

The district was crawling with freaks. Actually, it only started with longhairs like me and Howard. Much more eye-catching were lots of people in what were apparently eastern religious garb and foreigners of all types. On one block I must have overheard a dozen languages spoken. Sure there are as many or more spoken in New York, but aside from the United Nations, not in the same neighborhood. I was impressed.

I was even more impressed by the number of book stores. Howard hustled me down a street past a big church and then past one of the biggest used bookstores I had ever seen.

"I gotta go in there!" I said.

"Don't bother. I'll take you to the *good* one behind the Lampoon."

"That isn't the good one."

"Its o.k., but the other one's better."

"Shit."

He continued to drag me down the street, across another and down an alley to a narrow brick stairway. Inside was a wonderful smell.

"Café Algiers." He said with pride. Judging by his tone, you would think he had created the place out of the air with a snap of his fingers.

We drank shot glass sized cups of thick, almost solid coffee and ate sticky little pastries as we took in the human parade passing down the alley. There were something like a million really beautiful girls in this town. Maybe I would stay a while.

I was expansively narrating my recent doings to Howard.

"....and then the fool opens the *door*! It was like the whole fucking *ocean* suddenly rushed in on us! Toadstool went apeshit! Waving his arms and screaming how he was going to drown!"

Howard shook his head. "Come *on*, brother bear! You must be exaggerating!"

"May lightning strike me if I am!" I put a hand on my heart and raised the other. "The weirdest is yet to come man! Brad has this metal bar and he starts whacking Toadstool in the head with it! Would have bashed a lesser man senseless! He's hollering 'Shut up, shut up' and whacking him with the bar. Next thing you know, they are fighting like maniacs outside the car and me and Dudley are just watching 'cause we don't know *what* to do! In the meanwhile the fucking car almost floated away! It was pretty amazing, man!"

"Damn! That sounds like something out of a movie, only much, much stupider."

"You got *that* right, man!"

Howard and I spent the rest of the day wandering around Cambridge with him showing me the sights. That day I saw huge bronze rhinoceroses, the world's stupidest looking building with an ibis weathervane (and the world's coolest bookstore in the back) and a genuine atom smasher courtesy of a student that Howard knew.

The Stupid looking building housed the Harvard Lampoon magazine. When Howard had first referred to it as the "Lampoon" I assumed that it was some joke about its peculiar architecture. The bookstore was amazing! It seemed to be a repository of the arcana of the twentieth century. If I had had a lot of dough on me, I would have walked out with many volumes. As it was I made due with an

astonishing general science textbook with great illustrations from the early twenties. It cost two dollars but was worth its weight in gold so far as I was concerned. I was starting to explore the art of collage and this

was a source of weird and wonderful images.

We had lunch of falafel and tahini at the Vegetable King which was across the street from a movie theater named after Orson Welles. It was Sarabeth, who Toadstool had a major thing for,

that served us. She was a very pretty, but very tiny, woman, only about four feet eleven inches with a slender figure. I couldn't help wondering what her lovemaking with such a big man as Tom would look like. Could it actually be dangerous for her? Because I was speculating on that I giggled a little bit to myself as I tried to order which earned me a puzzled look. Didn't bother me a bit. I was totally used to people thinking I'm strange.

When we got back to Howard's place, there was a surprise waiting for us. The two Johns were sitting on his doorstep.

John Whalen was the first to see us and called out, "Howie! Dude!"

Howard stopped short. "Please refrain from calling me '*Howie*', O.K.? What are you guys doing here?"

"Hi Johns." I said.

"Yo! Adam!" said John Reynolds.

"Hey man!" said John Whalen. He turned back to Howard. "We were hitching up to Toronto. The Dead are playing up there. We were hoping maybe we could crash on your floor. It would really be great if that was cool with you."

Howard rolled his eyes. "Adam is already staying the night. You guys got any money for groceries?"

John Reynolds held up his hand. "*Not* a problem, man. Not a problem at all, we'll even *cook*."

Howard and I looked at each other and grinned. Howard opened the door and said, "Make yourselves comfortable my friends!"

"Well all right!" they said in chorus.

"Where's the market?" asked John Whalen.

"Let's get in the *mood* first." said Howard, picking up the canabaphone.

"Far out!", chorused the Johns.

The Johns, in spite of having to be told twice by the manager to stop racing shopping carts up and down the isles, impressed us by picking up the makings of a great chicken dinner along with a couple of six packs. They also picked up some of the weirdest shit I

have ever seen.

The checkers at the Purity Supreme were more or less used to the strange contents of the shopping carts they would see when a crowd of stoned hippies went through. I wonder if anyone who was *not* stoned ever bought pickled artichoke hearts and smoked oysters for a snack? After that evening, I have to admit that I developed a taste for both.

On the way out we got about fifteen multi colored high bounce rubber balls out of the vending machine.

We made our way back down the street with full back packs like the bearers from a safari movie.

I called Dudley's place and Jason answered the phone. He

seemed a little on edge, apparently the commies had been berating him for his love of flash and glamour. Counter revolutionary, it seems.

"At least I'm not 'boozh-wah'" He moaned.

A voice from the background came, "You're *that* too."

He covered the phone and I heard a muffled "Fuck you".

He came back on and said, "My **God!** I need to get *out* of this place!"

I asked Howard to invite him out for dinner.

The Johns were in the kitchen, cooking and baffling Jeff's cat, Fiddlestring, with the high bounce balls. Every so often the critter would fly out of the kitchen door like a furry cannon ball in pursuit of a multi-colored bullet. In spite of the mayhem, wonderful smells were emerging from their efforts.

Theodoros had gone to work so we could turn up the music. It looked like we were in for a fun evening.

Jason arrived just as dinner hit the kitchen table. He had lucked out and his first ride got him all the way to Cambridge. He told me that Brad and Toadstool were staying in Concord for the night building some basement shelves for Dudley but would come out the following day. The "Zone" guys were going to put them up.

The Zone was a household full of our pals in neighboring Somerville. They had a big two floor apartment but only three permanent residents so they always had lots of room. These guys were also one of the area's principal sources of acid. Tom and Brad could stay there as long as they wanted and Tom had agreed to build them a new record cabinet. It looked like Toadstool had a good-as-gold currency wherever he went in his carpentry skills.

The chicken was wonderfully tasty! They also had made perfectly steamed broccoli with butter and a bit of lemon juice and mashed

potatoes.



"I don't get it guys." I said, "Why do you avoid the kitchen so avidly at the gatherings when you can cook like this?"

John Reynolds spoke up first. "Well, for one thing, they never want to let us cook!"

"Its always dish duty!" said John Whalen. "Fuck that! Why should we scrub the damned pots? The veggie girls have no respect for our abilities."

"Actually", said John Reynolds, "I don't believe that they have respect for any male in the kitchen. Its like the feminism thing is supposed to give women power and eliminate male exclusivity in all sorts of areas but they still want to hang onto female exclusivity in those areas where it has been traditional. It makes me want to train to be a midwife just to piss them off!"

John Whalen said, "The feminist agenda, at least for some women goes *well* beyond equal pay for equal work. Many are seeking to establish matriarchy. Part of their ideal is lesbianism because actually dealing with males is too big a hassle and having them

around is too much of a challenge. They are constantly claiming oppression from guys who dispute their views, no matter how politely. The reason for this, they claim, is because they are trained to allow males to dominate the conversation, therefore we shouldn't even have a role in the debate."

"Its like they have put aside the entire concept of rigorous philosophical examination" said John Reynolds, "They have deluded themselves into believing that they can only raise consciousness in a totally supportive environment. They have no qualms about interpreting advocacy of any other position as a sexist attack. By taking this basically paranoid position, they free themselves from having to closely examine their own motivations. They can even use this tactic in just about any situation that might thwart them, claiming almost anything as a 'feminist issue'."

I had never heard the Johns wax so philosophical. These guys were more than just disruptive goof balls.

"Right," I said, "its what those guys who hang out with Dudley call being 'politically correct'."

"Yeah!", Said Jason, "They just label any idea they don't like with the nastiest name they know. What that name is, depends on what group you belong to. Counter revolutionary, reactionary, queer, revisionist, sexist...whatever. You don't have to *think* about it, its just code for 'enemy'."

At this point in time, I had already come to accept that most of the women I knew went through a "lesbian" stage. They would start

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telling everyone they knew that they were gay. Some even threw parties to celebrate it. Then, in a few months, in some cases, days, they would suddenly have a boyfriend. The majority of guys were smart enough to ignore the irony or even the outright humor of some of these situations. The price of anything short of uncritical affirmation and support was too high for most of us to pay.

I ended up doing the dishes myself while Howard played Don Cherry records for Jason and the Johns. Fiddlestring lay curled, purring in a corner of the kitchen as I worked, apparently basking in the left over

chicken aroma. He was happy enough having been given the liver and a bit of crispy skin with his wad of cat hash for dinner.

I hardly paid any attention when the phone rang in the other room. It was only when Howard called from the other room "Gretchen's coming over" that it became significant to me. I wondered if she knew I was here? Howard surely must have

mentioned it. Shit.

Sitting in the living room a little later, I found myself nervously chain smoking. I had no idea what sort of scene awaited me when Gretchen got there. I knew this was going to happen, but I was totally unprepared.

She arrived with her friend Lainie who was a strange girl. She would just sit and stare. She would stare at anything, frequently the back of someone's neck. Sometimes she would do it for fifteen minutes and then say something like, "You hate me, don't you?". It was suspected by some that half her brain was trapped in another dimension.

To my surprise, Gretchen gave me a hug and a kiss and whispered in my ear that her parents thought she was at Lainie's for the night. Just in case I missed her meaning, she gave my crotch a slight squeeze to make *sure* I understood.

I have to admit that her ripe little body against mine made it difficult for me to remember why I thought this girl was poison. In retrospect it is easy enough to see my penis taking over for my brain, but at the time it all seemed rational. "What's *really* the big problem here?" I thought.

Gretchen stayed that night with me in Jeff's room although we got little sleep. We ended up cuddled together on one side of the bed by morning, neither of us wanting to sleep in the rather large wet spot in the middle. Her energy and desire were impressive, almost frightening. She was willing to..... no, make that *insistent* upon trying everything our bodies were capable of. I was

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pleasantly surprised at the skills this fifteen year old had at love

methods that I knew only by reputation. She wanted to have sex continuously for as long as I could stay conscious and even attempted a few things when I was *un*conscious.

I was convinced that Gretchen thought she could make me forget that Joanie even existed. In moments like those she almost succeeded.

I admit that I felt no guilt this time, most likely because I knew that Joanie was in a different state. Guilt was useful to me in these times only as a warning that some sort of action was needed. My sense of personal responsibility for my actions was underdeveloped to say the least.

My problem was not what took place in bed. I had no problem with that at *all*, I assure you. A problem was having to listen to this girl carry on about things which I had no interest in whatsoever. In fairness I think I can safely say that she didn't give a shit about anything I had to say either. Her response to my attempts at conversation were countered by initiating makeout

sessions. This response was strongest whenever I tried to discuss my situation with Joanie. If I was going to make this situation right, it wasn't going to be through a heart to heart with Gretchen.

I'm getting ahead of myself though.

Gretchen was already up when I woke. She was sitting cross-legged on the end of the bed just looking at me. I knew that I had just made my life more complicated, but the sight of the cute nude girl on the bed with me certainly took the sting out of it.

"Aren't I allowed to enjoy the moment?" I asked myself. "Can't I just take simple pleasure without guilt?"

I said none of this out loud, but Gretchen saw my furrowed brow.

"What'cha thinkin'?" She asked.

"I'm thinking that you're going to fuck me to death." I grinned.

She giggled and said, "I'm gonna try at least."

She crawled up my body as she pulled down the sheet and for another hour our rising was delayed.

When I finally got my shit together it was eleven and the two Johns were already on the road, so I figured that I would call over to the "Zone" in Somerville.

I woke a pissed off householder who told me that Tom and Brad hadn't shown up yet and to *never* call before noon. I was curtly informed that this was one of the house rules.

Gretchen wanted to get some food so we went up the street to a place called "HI-FI PIZZA" where I had for my breakfast something

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called a "grinder".

The Boston grinder was the local variation on the submarine sandwich. Where I grew up it was known as a "wedge" and in south Jersey and Philly they called it a "hoagie". Up here it was always finished in a pizza oven with melted cheese and was thus a "grinder". The one I had was shaved steak with mushrooms, peppers and provolone. I was reliably informed that this was more the special taste of this region than either baked beans or chowder.

Interestingly, I have *never* been able to find anything special about the beans served inside route 128 and a good bowl of chowder is hard to come by, but there is a great grinder on every street corner.

It was all part of the general culture shock of coming to a new region and I knew the sense of slight disorientation well. If I were looking for what I called "soda pop", I would do well to ask for "tonic", that was if I recognized the place which sold it which was called a "spa" rather than just a corner market. Just to confuse things, a spa could also be a soda fountain or sandwich shop. Sometimes you could get a grinder at a spa and wash it down with tonic, but just try getting a bagel! God, you would think you had

asked for an elephants ear on a bun!

One thing about living in New York that New Yorkers take for granted is the spice of Jewish culture flavoring everything. New York's two other major white minorities were present and then some. The Irish and Italians were everywhere but there was none of the prominent presence of a large Jewish population was very conspicuous by its absence. No bagels, no matzoh-ball soup, no Ruben sandwiches (granted, not *kosher*, but a New York deli favorite) or many of the other things which I had come to regard as staples of existence. I'm sure there were Jews here, I just don't think any of them were in the food service industry.

When we got back, Howard had a message from Tom and Brad who were on their way into town.

They had my pot in Tom's car which was my only immediate source of money. I was betting I could sell most of it to the Zone guys.

Gretchen had to go home so I asked Howard to take me over to

the Zone.

It was on Calvin street in neighboring Somerville which was a very different town from Cambridge. While Cambridge had built its culture and businesses to serve the great student population and thrived on people of all types living together, Somerville could be described as aggressively "townie".

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The people of that city saw Harvard and MIT as a disease determined to erode their lifestyle. They used the term "Barney" to refer to anyone who moved to their town that didn't represent what they thought Somerville should be all about. This included intellectuals, foreign or even out of state students and certainly included long haired hippies. No town had ever been so protective of its blue collar culture.

The guys at the Zone had to endure the taunts of the neighborhood kids which were not discouraged by their parents. The parents held the same attitudes but were slightly more polite.

You could hear them in casual conversation about the day's news. If there was a robbery or a drunken car crash, the instant assumption was that a Harvard student was somehow involved.

That Somerville produced a disproportionate number wayward and delinquent youth in the area was much closer to the truth, and victimizing "Barneys" was an approved civic pastime.

I only mention this to explain the fact that the words "DIE HIPPPYS" (sic.) were spray painted on the sidewalk in front of their triple decker.

The funny thing was, if you find that sort of thing funny, the Zone didn't get the worst of it. There was an apartment full of Jesus freaks who lived across the street who were tormented mercilessly and had had their little store front church on Washington street defaced by graffiti time and again. When I first heard about this, I just didn't get it.

The neighborhood was mostly (but not exclusively) Catholic and these guys were protestant, but I don't think that was the problem. I think now, looking back to that time, that these folks were an embarrassment

to the rest of the neighborhood because of their fundamentalist interpretation of the bible. They engendered a sense of guilt in the community in seeming more moral by comparison.

Robby, who I knew only slightly, answered the door and invited us in. A poorly recorded tape of a Dead concert was straining the stereo speakers and making conversation nigh impossible. Brad and Tom were sitting on the couch doing bong hits with Jordan, another one of the Zone guys. These guys were constantly stoned and therefore paranoid.

Without any evidence, they had decided that their phone was tapped. No one was allowed to mention anything having to do with drugs on their phone and they never described any of the house members movements on the phone. This had all started when one of them heard a little bit of crackling on the line. I think

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that the fact that they had all once worked in a defense (i.e. weapons) plant together had contributed to this attitude.

One of these guys once told me that he was positive that they had been given drugs in their lunches which were supposed to make them better workers. He also said that a guy was once fired for saying that he thought Nixon was a crook.

I sat down next to Brad who passed me the bong as he coughed and sputtered trying to hold his breath. The guy turned beet red and pounded on his knee with his fist as he struggled to extract every microgram of potency out of the lung full of smoke. When he finally gave in, only the tiniest bit of actual pot smoke emerged.

I did a hit and so did Howard, neither of us reaping the efficiency

from it that Brad had.

The side of the tape ended allowing me to talk with Tom and Brad a little.

"Do you guys have the rest of my stuff in the car?" I asked.

"We got your pack, if that's what you mean." said Brad.

"Far out. I need that shit."

I turned to Jordan. "How are you guys set for weed?"

"Can't have too much I guess", he replied, "you got some to sell?"

"Yeah. I got a couple of oh-zees that I could be convinced to part with."

I got the key from Tom and ran down to the car to fetch my tobacco tin full of grass.

Before too long I had another fifty bucks in my pocket to go with the fifty from the painting job and Brad,

Tom, Howard and I were off to do we-knew-not-what.

I had already had lunch but Tom *really* wanted to go to the Vegetable King and we all had some fearsome munchies. Howard decided to head back to his place for the time being but said we would hook up later.

The Vegetable King was not too crowded, it being a Tuesday afternoon. Its busy hours were in the evening when they sold big ticket dinners to liberal establishment types. The management only tried to clear out poor hippies who would nurse a single cup of coffee all night when they needed a table for someone with dough. Until then, we were valuable "atmosphere".

I had a bowl of thick black bean soup with crusty brown bread which was wonderfully tasty but made me fart uncontrollably a few hours later.

Tom tried to be as friendly as possible to Sarabeth who was receiving his attentions well. It looked like it was possible that she

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liked him as much as he liked her. She invited him to come visit her

and following her shift that night, I didn't see Toadstool for three days.

During the rest of that week, I hung out with Brad and Howard and went to see Gretchen again at her parent's house when they were away. I knew that every time I touched that girl, I drove a wedge between me and Joanie, but I didn't have the self discipline to end it.

My phone calls with Joanie were still frequent but becoming more polite and less easy and comfortable. It was obvious that she knew something was going on, but there also seemed to be something else. We were both trying to set ourselves up with excuses not to go

to New York. Gretchen had said that she wanted to go with me, but that was never going to happen. I was not going down there just to have some drama about Joanie and Gretchen. If it turned out that Gretchen could go, I wouldn't go. One way or another, I would get out of it.

In spite of the strangeness with Gretchen (which, no matter how I paint it here, was much more pleasure than pain) I was growing to really like Cambridge and was thinking hard about moving there and getting a job.

Finding a place turned out to be relatively easy. There was a big rooming house near Harvard Square with rent low enough that I would only have to work part time to have a roof over my head as well as beer and cigarette money.

Within a couple of days I had made my decision to relocate to the big wood building on Kirkland street. I moved in with only the contents of my backpack and Brad as my first night house guest. Tom was still hanging out with Sarabeth.

The rent was thirty-five dollars a week and I even had my own bathroom while almost everyone else had to use the one at the end of the hall.

Located on the third floor, the main room was quite small, with the twin sized bed taking up a fifth of the available floor space. It was right next to the window which looked out on a driveway although the view was mostly obscured by the top of a large maple tree. No great loss.

I figured that I could move the contents of my bedroom at my Mom's house into this cosey little pad and still have a little space left to move around in.

I would wait until after the painting thing at the restaurant was over to worry about getting my things up there. I was used to

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living out of a back pack and could do so comfortably for several weeks .

The next day, Brad rented the room next door for himself which went for twenty dollars a week for the rest of his stay in Boston, so now I would have Gretchen staying over if I wanted.

It took me a few days to figure it out, but I slowly learned that a little less than half of the house's residents were recently released from a local mental hospital. Not one of them was free of whatever condition put them there in the first place, and all of them had a "system" mentality. Their lives revolved around food stamps, welfare, disability checks and unemployment offices. They were generally involved in months long processes of fighting any number of minor criminal complaints against them. I found it darkly entertaining that many of these people seemed to be very well versed in legal procedure and precedent while being

essentially out of it about almost everything else.

The following Monday, Tom and Brad headed back to Connecticut without me and a spooky black man who kept muttering about the judgment of Allah moved into Brad's room. He was a quiet individual, save for his loud and fervent prayers five times a day, who never actually spoke *to* anyone but would speak *about* them in their presence as if narrating the exchange. Usually lacing the narrative with ethnic slurs. For instance, If I were to ask him when he was going to be done with the stove in the kitchen.

"Hey, Nassim, when are you going to be done with the stove?"

"The Jewish devil is trying to rush me... I wonder why he is watching me."

"Hey, man. I'm not trying to rush you."

"He tries to make friendly overtures, but I know he has a hidden agenda."

"Why are you being such an asshole? I just wanna know when I can make lunch."

"Now he starts to pressure me. Allah give me strength to silence this insolent one!"

Usually, it seemed like a better idea to just let him do his thing and stay out of his way. He was kind of tightly wound.

Then there was the woman down the hall who would burst into tears whenever anyone would look at her.

The guy in the big room on the first floor, who had the impressive name Andreas Donatti, was smugly sure that he had it all figured out. As far as he was concerned all history since 1896, when he insisted a *great inversion* (whatever *that* means) had taken

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place, was a sham set up by the big governments and agents of an

extra terrestrial empire. He wore a hat carefully lined with aluminum foil. He was never willing to say exactly why, but implied that it might be a good idea if everyone were to do so. Any statement he made ended with "I am ***not*** insane!" It was his own personal punctuation mark. Donatti had a weird habit of standing in the driveway between the two buildings staring straight ahead for hours at a time. It was like he was looking out to sea waiting for a ship to appear on the horizon. Not only did he not explain this behavior, he didn't even admit to doing it.

Marvin Davis was a depressive blond freaker who oftentimes spoke about himself in the third person. He would say things like, "There was a big party in Somerville last night and there were lots of beautiful women there but none of them wanted to talk to *Marvin Davis*." He said his own name in a disparaging tone that most of us would have reserved for names like Adolph Hitler. No one ever called him just "Marvin", he was always "Marvin Davis", sort of like Charlie Brown from the *Peanuts* comic strip. He was a nice enough fellow, I guess, but absolutely *no* fun to spend time with. There was an unconfirmed rumor that Marvin Davis was a former Manson family member.

Lots of people who lived there, of course were more or less normal upstairs but just enjoyed the cheap rent. Those were mostly freaks or students.

It didn't even sink in for a couple of days, but this was the first time in my life I had my own place. In spite of the fact that I didn't spend much time there, I had lived with my mom up until then.

My own place. Unfortunately, it was too small to throw a party.

I ended up pumping a lot of change into the pay phone in the lobby telling everyone about my sudden relocation.

When I called Joanie, we ended up having a lengthy conversation about our relationship. Without coming out and saying so, Joanie made it clear that she knew about what was going on with me and Gretchen.

"You know", she said, "they say fifteen will get you twenty. You should be careful."

"You're not the first person to say that to me. You shouldn't worry."

"I worry because I love you, but you're an adult and you're not my problem anymore. I can't keep wondering about you, balancing what you say against what you do. You're a good guy, but you're not really into being *my* good guy."



"I *want* to be your guy..."

She cut me off. "No, you really don't. You *want to* want to, ya' know what I mean? But you just aren't that way. That doesn't make you a bad guy, it just means that you're kidding yourself if you think you want a monagamous relationship."

Just like that. The kiss off. I tried to keep it light after that and make more small talk, but we both knew that had been the major conversational point. It was significant that neither one of us alluded to New York when we said good-by.

In spite of the fact that the way things turned out was entirely my own fault, I wasn't going to allow that minor detail to get in the way of my feeling that it was monstrously unfair. I was in a crummy mood for the rest of the day. I went to my room to smoke dope and listen to loud music until Nassim beat on the wall and loudly prayed for Allah to smite me.

After a lot of thought, I finally came to the conclusion that my wanting her to be loyal to me was just a big ego trip. It was like I thought I could take a beautiful woman like her and hold her up as some sort of trophy. I had gotten into this whole sicko head space that made the pleasure I took in her company depended on the knowledge that no one else did. I had sought the envy of other men more ardently than the love of that woman and as a result fucked up royally.

She hadn't ruled out the idea of us spending time, even very intimate time, together in the future, but she plainly expected a higher level of honesty from me, both toward her and myself.

If I had to start being honest, it seemed best to start with myself. Fact was, I was in a place where I thought about *girls* and was no where near the place where I could think about one woman.

It seems so obvious now, but at that time it was like unraveling a major secret of the universe.

Having figured out that little nugget, I judged that I had done a good days work so far as soul searching was concerned. I rewarded myself by getting an anchovy, olive and pineapple pizza and watching monster movies on my tiny black and white tv.

Work on the mural at the Resturaunt started a couple of days later. It turned out to be a far less creative gig than I had hoped. The entire thing had been planned and diagramed by one guy, so it ended up being almost a paint-by-numbers kind of deal. It was easy work, but they didn't need to have hired artists for the job, any decent house-painter could have done my work. I think artists were cheaper though.

It ended up looking kind of nice, sort of a Diego Rivera kind of thing. It took about a week and paid my rent for a whole month with beer money left over. Not too shabby. Unfortunately, jobs like this were rare. Sooner or later I was going to have to start punching a clock somewhere.

I hitch hiked back and forth between Larchmont and Cambridge about four times over the next week

bringing back a duffle bag load of my possessions each time.

One person who picked me up was one of these "theory" guys. He had the entire thing doped out. He reminded me of Donatti only more just sort of weird rather than just plain nuts.

"Ya see, man, the CIA is just a cover to keep our minds off of the *real* undercover organization. You ever heard of the NSA? That means National Security Agency. They're the *real* spooks, man. They've turned people into robots and planted all kinds of agents in the counter culture."

"So how do you know I'm not one of them. Or, for that matter, how do I know that you're not?"

"Hey man, don't try to fuck with my head! I can spot one of their guys in a second and you're not the type. Look for the ones with the flowers in their hair who *never* talk about anything but peace and love. The ones who seem a little over the top."

Sounded a lot like Wings, but that was just a mean thought. I chuckled and said, "I know a guy like that, he's basically a harmless parasite though."

"Wake up, man, *wake up*! Just because a parasite doesn't kill its host, doesn't mean its harmless! It just means its an *efficient parasite*. These guys spread discord and make you question movement values. They suck up your energy. The Agency calls 'em 'ballast' because they are there to keep us rising from the underground into the mainstream."

"You're pullin' my chain, man."

"The only thing being *pulled*, man, is the wool over your eyes! I don't want you to just believe what I'm tellin' you out of hand, man, *test* him! Next time you see him just say how you heard about ballast men from the Agency and watch him sweat if you imply he fits the profile!"

I bet he would have sweat if I did just because Wings got uptight whenever anyone got on his act. He knew his front was superficial and if anyone chipped at it he could be counted on to go *way*

freaky. Might be fun, actually.

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When he let me off he made me take a small stack of pamphlets which had been Xeroxed from densely hand written pages. They provided hours of paranoid entertainment.

My little room ended up being mostly filled with books. I had had for all my life an interest in science and literature not to mention an insatiable thirst for science fiction. I also brought with me my treasured (and **heavy**) collection of 78 rpm records. Life without King Oliver was simply not worth living.

These wonderful discs were like great golden treasures, but painfully mortal. I broke several of them in transport and several others over the next few months as I attempted to create a livable arrangement of furniture.

When Gretchen came to visit, she marveled at all the books. Hers was not a family that stressed reading

and she harbored a sort of superstitious awe for the printed word.

"So", She asked, "you're, like, real smart and stuff?"

"Well, I like to read. Maybe I have gotten smart as a consequence of that."

"Why aren't you in college?"

My least favorite question. "I'm sick of school. I don't think I could face another big institution dominating my life. Besides, I didn't actually do all that well in high school."

She looked confused. "You're so smart! How could you have not done well?"

"You sound like my guidance counselor. Getting along in school takes a lot more than a high IQ, in fact, a high IQ can get in the way. Its easy for me to learn ....I do it as naturally as breathing ..... but I can't be *taught*, you know, follow a fixed curriculum. Also, I was really socially inept in that environment. I didn't feel anything in common with those people and many of them were actually hostile toward me. Put me in a situation like that, and I always end up near the bottom of the class."

"That is so weird," She said, " because I am, like, not half as big a reader as you and I get A's and B's all the time, at least when I bother to go to school."

Gretchen, I am sure had little idea of what I was talking about. She was not the world's brightest girl, not *stupid* either but she never pretended to have a great deal of sophistication. She was actually quite centered and comfortable with herself, more so than I was at fifteen. I admit I was a little jealous of her. I was actually a little hostile toward her. She was the over indulged child of a rich

family who had the freedom to come and play with us social rejects

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but could just drop it and go home when she was tired of it. It was an ugly thought, but there it was.

That afternoon roughly I doggy fucked her so hard that she yelped from the force of some of my thrusts. From the room next door came prayers against fornicators.

With the painting job that drew me here out of the way and nothing in particular on the horizon, you might have thought that I would be taking stock and making plans. Nothing could have been farther from the truth.

For the next two weeks I worked a few day jobs to pay for stuff, hung out with Howard and spent as much time having sex with Gretchen as I could. I had been getting a little tired of her. Any time we tried to talk I would find her getting more and more on my nerves. I never let it show outwardly but it was reflected in our lovemaking which became even rougher and weirder than it had been. I was never violent toward her but I certainly got involved with things that could be thought of as degrading. I'll say this much, sex with Gretchen was *pure*. It was uncorrupted with

the baggage of love or the pretense of love and its growing undercurrent of hostility actually added to its

pleasure. Anyone who has ever experienced a so-called "hate fuck" will know what I'm talking about. There are a lot of different kinds of fucks out there, and those which are tinged with hostility can be among the most intense.

Luckily, her having to return to school intervened before things could totally drift from the world of the Kama Sutra into that of the Marquis de Sade. She would be out in western Massachusetts and I would see her only on occasional weekends. Since the relationship was based entirely on sex, there were few letters or phone calls. She sent me a photo of herself in her school uniform. In her pleated skirt with knee socks and her hair in a pony tail she looked about twelve. I threw the picture away because it made me feel like a pervert to keep it. The "relationship" was effectively over.

I hooked up with the building manager, a Rastafarian dude named Greg who had a pick up truck and we made some money moving students. They were flowing into town in huge numbers now and they all needed to get new furniture into their apartments. Some of them were right here at the rooming house and needed to know where they could score pot and acid. After a week of this I had a couple hundred bucks to pay bills, have fun with and go to New York on, which now looked like a better idea

with Gretchen more or less out of the picture.

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In a sort of preparation for the trip, I tried to phone Joanie as often as I could. I was consciously trying to cultivate her friendship

and not bring up any heavy issues about our relationship. This was

profitable on a lot of fronts. By talking without a putting a lot of pressure on her, I was able to learn a lot of things.

Apparently she *had* slept with Wings shortly after the gathering in Birmingham. She called it a "mercy fuck". He had literally begged her to have sex with him to which she had agreed if he promised to leave her alone afterwards.

He did, but he also bragged about it and claimed that she had

begged *him*. Her room mate, who was supposedly his girlfriend, had overheard him refer to Joanie as "my bitch", in a conversation with a friend. Since then, Wings had kept a pretty low profile. The room mate, Eileen by name, I had never met her, said she was done with men and came out as a lesbian for a week or so and then hooked up with someone named Jerry who I heard was a real nice guy.

Joanie and I spoke a lot about direction in our lives. She told me that she had been harboring an internal metaphor. She said that she sometimes saw herself on a raft drifting down a river wondering where she would finally come ashore. Her landing point was, in her conception, her life's destiny. Sometimes, she would see something of interest on the shore and try to paddle herself closer to it in order to get a better look. The problem was that the closer to the shore she got, the stronger the current got. The result was that as soon as she tried to make for a destination, she had to fight the current.

"You see", she said, "Going with the current is easy, but when you define a goal you have to fight to get to

it and the more forces are working against you to distract you from it. When you're adrift, life is easy and time isn't a big problem. That's you Adam. You're adrift."

"You think I'm not challenged enough?"

"Let me put it this way, you have a way of avoiding anything difficult. For instance, building a relationship with someone is difficult and demanding. Just fucking a whole lot of girls is less so."

"Hey! I'm not fucking a whole lot of girls."

"I'm sure you would be if it was easy. I suppose becoming a good Casanova requires work too."

"Wow! You don't think much of me, do you?"

"I think a lot of you. I love you, but you are like Huckleberry Finn living in some eternal lazy summer afternoon. It might be pleasant

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for you, but its hardly inspirational to me."

"C'mon, I just want to be free of the rat-race, what's wrong with that?"

"What's wrong with that is that by drifting, you accomplish nothing. You may cause no harm, but you also lend no help. You're just a dropout. You have even stopped painting. You have a God given gift and all you do with it is decorate peoples cars and guitars. I think there might be a Rembrandt inside of you."

"A Rembrandt, huh? Well, now I don't know *what* you think of me."

Surprisingly, these conversations brought us closer together. I was finding myself looking forward to New York as much to spend time *talking* to Joanie as to have sex with her. I actually still didn't

know if sex was still in the cards for us anyway. I certainly hoped so.

Just before the New York trip, I interviewed for a full time job loading trucks at a warehouse. They seemed to think I was o.k., so I was scheduled to start in two weeks. It was a company which made and distributed mop heads all over the country. I was walking around the warehouse checking out the product. They had something like twenty different types with names like "E-Z-Glo" and "Ev-R-Shine". They all seemed to be pretty ordinary mop heads.

It was just one of those many things which most people never think about. Where mop heads come from. The reality was precisely as fascinating as I might have imagined, had I ever bothered to imagine such a thing, if not less so. The job paid \$2.75 an hour which was actually twenty-five cents over minimum wage. It wasn't my first full time job, I had worked summers when I lived with my mom, but it was the first where I had to use all the money I made to live on.

Howard had taken me totally under his wing as far as local culture went. He introduced me to a local movie house which specialized in short films. We ended up making a bit of a scene when we dropped acid

and went to a show titled, "The Eleven Funniest Cartoons Ever Made". People were, of course, expected to laugh, but we exhibited what must have looked like symptoms of impending brain hemorrhage. That was where I learned the great life lesson that psychoactive drugs and Tex Avery should be kept separate.

We also attended jazz concerts and he showed me the Museum of Fine Arts, which had the most amazing Oriental collection. I got

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lost in a Japanese screen which depicted a wild, tossing sea with grace and amazing precision. A cylindrical glass case held almost a hundred Netsuki, each one a tiny sculptural masterpiece.

The weekend of the New York gathering was upon us. Howard and I were going to hitch down together. The hitch from Boston to New York could be expected to be pretty fast so we only allowed a day for getting there. If we set off first thing in the morning on Friday, we figured we had a better than average chance of being on Staten Island by sundown. The early September morning was pleasantly warm. Howard made up a cardboard sign with NYC on it in big red letters.

We had decided to take the Mass. Pike west to meet up with 91 at Springfield, from which we would head south to meet up with 84

and then 684 followed by 287 into the city. In spite of the fact that this was a far more round-about route than directly along the coast on 95, the rides tended to be better on the inland track and the cops were less inclined to stop us. The highway patrolmen on 95 were very aggressive and territorial.

Our first ride was from a couple in a station wagon. The wife was clearly pissed off that her husband had picked us up. She looked like she was really afraid of us. The man, who was in his early thirties, was the one who made all the conversation.

"I *had* to pick you boys up. When I was in the service, I hitch-hiked home whenever I got leave just so I could see this little lady." He pointed at the nervous woman beside him. "She was happy enough about it then." He had been in the army, stationed out west just waiting to be shipped out to Vietnam when our involvement in the war ended. "I have to admit, I was both relieved *and* disappointed. It was a lousy war and I was glad not to have to fight it, but I felt like I had missed my chance to play a role in history."

I spoke up. "History is more than war and politics. Its also science, art and business. We gotta get over the idea that history is only made at gun point."

The wife muttered, "Do you *hear* that?!?"

The guy said, "Hush, hon," and then to me, "You're right about that, but I didn't see it that way at the time. The way my dad talked about World War Two, I figured that it was the only experience worth having. My dad really felt bad for me for not getting to go and he pretty well convinced me that I should feel that way too. I got over it when I learned that my best buddy from high school lost an arm and a leg over there and he seemed to think it had been an

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experience he could have gotten by without. When I saw him, it was pretty easy to see that his was the better argument and he didn't even have to say anything."

The woman really looked like she was ready to bolt. Frankly, I think it gave me and Howard more *reason* to be scared than she had. She really looked like a cornered animal or something. Every time she saw one of us move out of the corner of her eye she would twitch or give a little gasp. By the time they left us off at Sturbridge, we were exhausted from her paranoid vibes. I honestly have no idea why she was so skittish. Was it just because Howard and I looked weird?

From Sturbridge to Hartford, we shared the bed of a pickup truck with a desk and a roll of barbed wire. I tried not to contemplate the

consequences of a possible collision. The guy up front never said a word to us except to ask where we were going. The opportunity for conversation with the driver on these kinds of rides were generally minimal.

When he let us off it was a little before noon.

We were making pretty good time. I wanted to put the sign down for a while to have a snack and smoke a couple of cigarettes.

I think, for a lot of guys, hitch-hiking was a form of transport resorted to because of poverty. Not me. I actually got a sense of empowerment from it. I could get from one place to another with only the clothes on my back and the smile on my face. What got me from one place to another was the good will inherent in mankind. While others saw humanity as generally selfish and mean spirited, I saw evidence to the contrary every day. If they had suspicions about me when they picked me up, which was sometimes the case, they were a friend when they dropped me off. In this way, their view of the world was also improved. The hitch-hiker was like a Johnny Appleseed of good vibes. People like the nervous woman were a rare exception. I didn't see her type often. Obviously, if she had been driving alone, she would never have picked me up.

Actually, single women only accounted for about ten percent of the rides I would get, if that. Understandably, I suppose, they tended to be cautious about picking up male strangers on the highway. The ones who *did* stop were likely to be interesting rides.

There was a whole industry of prostitutes that served the long distance trucker community. They drove from truck stop to truck stop chatting with truckers via CB radio and making dates with the lone cowboys of the road. They would occasionally pick up hitch-hikers with the idea of digging up a little trade. Even if you turned

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down their offers to do business, they were always good for getting you to the nearest truck stop. Paying for sex was one typical masculine right of passage that I never went through. It was partially because I found the idea of lovemaking as a business transaction more than a little icky, but it was mostly due to vanity. I simply didn't see myself as someone who had to pay for sex and it would have really fucked with my self image to have done so even once.

These were the only whores I ever met and they never seemed particularly appealing. They had the same general demeanor as the tired looking waitresses who worked the overnight at the truck stops, just painted in brighter colors. I'm sure, at least in a few cases, they were the same people.

Another type of woman who might pick up a hitch-hiker was a woman on the run. Typically, she was a pent up housewife who just decides to split for a day, a week or forever from her husband and kids and house and everything. I actually met several of these in my career on the road. They were dangerous and sometimes drunk, but they could be a lot of fun. They tended not to give a shit about anything. The only time I ever had sex in a car was with one

of these ladies on a blowout. These gals were always good for buying a meal in exchange for just being *listened* to. Evidently that was not something that the husbands of such women were good

at.

I remember one woman who had tears in her eyes while she drove and talked to me. When I asked her why, she told me that her husband would never let her talk that long without interrupting her or even hitting her.

There were also lady truckers who differed little from their male brethren save for the obvious. I once received a stern lecture for showing bemusement at seeing a pretty and very petite woman expertly handling a double trailer rig. She had gotten into driving when her husband had dropped dead, leaving his rig to her. Her best way to make money with it was to learn to drive it rather than sell it. She maintained that she was as good a driver as any and better than many. In our short acquaintance, she never gave me a reason to think otherwise.

Mostly, though, my rides were male and they always seemed to have plenty to say.

When I bothered to think about it, I was impressed by how much I could learn about someone who would pick me up. I think people

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will tell hitch-hikers things they won't tell their friends, wives or mothers. If you want to hear about people's secret desires, and don't want to become a psychiatrist, stick your thumb out.

I have had business men confess to me homosexual desires that their communities or even their wives had no idea about. They would see in me a possibility for carrying out those desires. They were wrong of course. I'll admit to a certain amount of curiosity about gay sex, but its purely intellectual. To participate in such things just didn't have any appeal for me.

Confessions of crimes were also a common thing for me to hear. Thank God no one ever claimed to have committed murder to me, but I did hear about robberies, house breakings, embezzlements and industrial sabotage. That last was particularly interesting. I wonder if most of America is aware of how much destruction of property, theft and just plain doing a crappy job goes on in work places. It must come out of some deep and basic discontent with things in general.

The most common thing I would hear about was adultery. I swear that every other guy in the world is



fucking around on his wife. I didn't believe in marriage and hearing this went a long way toward reinforcing that. I also believed in free love, or at least

thought I did, and therefore it wasn't the idea of having sex with different people that offended me. It was that they were *pretending* that they believed in the institution of marriage without living that belief.

It was like these guys were working every day to support a society of false values which extended to every facet of our civilization. Adultery was a living symbol of the way America treated trust and it was reflected in our businesses and our politics and the way we educated our children. These were the same people who would on every Sunday swear before their God a set of values that they did not truly believe. The effect on the mass psychology was devastating. The weird thing was that I rarely got the impression that these were "bad people". They were playing by the rules as they saw them. If one were to compare my moral foundation to theirs, it would be theirs which would prove to be more functional, more likely to result in general success for that person.

Joanie had called me a "dropout" and she was right in the sense that I didn't consider myself a participant in this civilization. I didn't think I could ever be one with it in this state. I felt that I was incapable of that kind of hypocrisy. I was wrong, but that's what I thought. I could clearly point to what I heard from my rides as a

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major reason why.

Joanie possessed a great social conscience which I didn't have. Hers was always a quest for justice for the individual. I agreed with her that individual justice was hard to come by, but as a civilization, I thought we were getting what we deserved.

I think that Joe was the person with whom I discussed hitch hiking the most mainly because he was even more dedicated to this mode of travel than I was. When I told him about the view of humanity that I had gotten from thumbing rides, he found it pretty humorous.

"You know, only something like a tenth of a tenth of one percent of the people on the road even pick up hitch hikers. The people you are talking about are a pretty small sample and they all have one thing in common. *They* are the ones who would consider picking up a hitch hiker. The rest of roadway humanity are in fear of us or view us as vermin, or best they are sympathetic to us but figure someone else will pick us up. To most of them we are invisible.

"A lot of people actually are offended that we are even out there, not because we are a danger to them or ourselves and not because we interfere with traffic but because the very notion of a 'free ride' is anathema to them. If *we* are getting a free ride, then where is *their* free ride?

"To those people we are putting their view of the world out of balance. If we are successful, then something is wrong with their world view and they suddenly have to start thinking again. Which is something that someone who has the world all ready all figured out doesn't want to do. Our very existence looks to them like a violation of natural law.

"When you philosophize about human motivations on the basis of only the people who have picked you up, you are making the same mistake as all of those who don't as they cower behind their wheels, so seemingly secure in their tiny piece of moving space. Just because we are out on the highway with these people, doesn't mean we are in the same world."

Well, it was another point of view.

When Howard and I walked back up to the ramp, we got a ride right away from a guy with a plumbing van who was heading all the way to where we were supposed to meet route 684.

A trucker got us into central Manhattan by four o'clock and from there we set out on the final leg of our journey through a network

of subway trains and city busses.

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The site of the gathering was a converted warehouse on Staten Island. It belonged to Raymond James Hale MacEnlowe Jr., alias Raymack.

Raymack wasn't rich (although at the time I perceived him to be), he got the place for a song as little more than a shell with money he earned captaining a boat in a fishing fleet for two years while going to school part time. He finally gave up school and made all his money for each year working the boat for a few months during the spring and fall. The warehouse was his ongoing project. His

vision was to make it a sort of a village within the city where his friends could live, run businesses, have concerts and interact with the community. So far there were only about three finished apartments with a big common kitchen and a Quaker "meeting house" on the ground floor. The rest was five wide, mostly empty floors in the big reinforced concrete structure. I had heard that the project had been running out of steam lately and he offered to host a gathering here to see if he could stir up interest in some people to move here and work on the place.

It didn't look like the best bet. The place was in a drab industrial neighborhood with only other warehouses and factories in the vicinity. The building looked like it would have to be cold in winter as no one would be able to afford to heat it.

One nice touch was that various people had painted murals on some of the concrete walls and Raymack had encouraged me to do likewise. "I want the place to look as festive as a pile of concrete can," he said.

Most of the people from the Northeast were there already when Howard and I arrived. The main meeting area was on the second floor and was reached by a wide concrete stairway. There was also a freight elevator large and strong enough to lift a car next to the loading dock. The scene on the second floor was like a big indoor park. There were back packs and sleeping bags against the walls. Some of those bags were unrolled and occupied by people giving or receiving back rubs. There was enough room on the floor for several people to be playing guitars without disturbing one another. There were also lots of people just chatting, drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes. In a corner one couple was making out and in another a girl was doing a tarot card reading for a guy. The girl was Joanie and the guy was Raymack.

I had learned from experience to never interrupt one of Joanie's readings so I just waived at both of them and then went off to find a place for my shit. I would play it cool and let Joanie seek me out

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when she wanted to.

I went up to the third floor which was empty save for a few back packs. A short distance from the freight elevator shaft was a small empty office without a door. There was no furniture, just a little shelf with an old (disconnected) phone sitting on it. There was a big window which in a former life had glass, looking out over the barren landscape of the hardwood floor. I tossed my pack in there staking out my own tiny bit of turf. I looked around the floor which was made of sturdy wood. There was virtually nothing on it except for a stray nut or bolt here and there. Off in a corner was an old forklift which may or may not have been functional. The windows were huge and partitioned into at least twenty smaller panes each. The glass in them was rippled with an imbedded wire mesh. In spite of the distressed industrial ambiance, the place looked like it could be home to a nice art studio. It might be fun to work on really big paintings, but they would just pile up around the place. I knew I didn't have the drive to really get out and promote myself as an artist and besides my brand of psychedelic primitivism was not in fashion. My artistic influences were were illustrative painters like Chesley Bonestell the great astronomical visionary and medical illustrator Dr. Frank Netter although the content of the work itself came out of an active dream life. My paintings celebrated science when I lived in an anti-rationalist milieu. Among my friends, my work was admired for its weirdness and humor, but not well understood. In fairness, I didn't understand it too well myself, I just knew that it was what I wanted to paint.

There was a ten foot high by fifteen foot long section of wall on the other side of the office that I thought I might paint. It would be my largest ever. Not quite as large as the one at the restaurant, only it would be all mine.

As I looked over the wall and sketched out the mural in my mind, I felt two hands find their way around my waist from behind. I turned around and found Joanie in my arms, laying her head on my shoulder, holding me tightly. It just felt *so* much better than....better than anything.

"Hi there." I said.

"Don't talk, O.K.?" She said. "Just *be* with me for a few minutes."

And so we just stood there in a warm embrace, feeling the heat from each other's bodies....sharing our heartbeats. We finally parted and I was able to take a good look at her. She was, if anything, more beautiful than the last time I saw her. She was barefoot wearing a floor length Indian print cotton dress which

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cinched in just below her breasts and had her hair pulled back into a ponytail which hung to the small of her back. She gazed at me with her huge blue eyes and I realized that I would do just about anything to be with this woman. I wanted to kiss her but something told me to let her take the first step with everything. I had fucked up, so logic told me that she was calling the shots as to how we were going to go from here.

So we just existed as one for those few seconds, breathing together, being aware of each other's flesh and soul.

After another long hug, we eventually separated and walked downstairs, hand in hand. We could talk later, but right now we just cultivated proximity.

When we were down stairs near her pack, she pulled out the cards and handed them to me. I knew the routine and shuffled

them, paused to cut the pack three ways and shuffled again.

On a spread purple satin cloth she dealt out a pattern of cards with the ancient images contrived to reveal the undercurrents of the human condition. Kings and fools and hanging men. Rods and cups and stars. This was such an expression of the differences between us. I was a rationalist materialist and she dwelt in a world of unseen forces. For me, the stars were other suns which warmed other planets, for her they were a source for portents regarding our day to day fate on Earth.

This spread of cards which seemed more like a game to me, were for her a doorway into my destiny, my origin, my meaning as a person.

Here was an extraordinarily sensitive woman. She was really tuned in to what others felt in a way that I could probably never understand. She once told me that anyone could do the things she did, but most of us didn't want to.

She spoke like a teacher delivering a lecture as she pointed to cards and groupings of cards. "This is you and your relationship to the rest of the universe. Look here. This is a facet of that relationship. A mage. He is a manipulator. Death, this is change. In this position it shows change in process." And on and on. For all I knew, the cards may as well have been the heart, moon and clover shaped marshmallows from a box of "Lucky Charms." It seemed that it wasn't the cards which told the tale, but her basic insight into my personality.

She told the story a little differently.

"Try to imagine", she said, "an American society where the average person spent a lot of energy delving the feelings of others.

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How could a business man stay focused on his greed if he was too aware of its effect, how he puts the world out of balance, how he grows richer while the poor grow poorer? How would a general be able to fight a war over some stupid cause when he felt the pain of the people who's lives are destroyed?

"Once upon a time, leaders of business and government would keep a person like me close to them to help them understand their position in relation to the rest of the world and what effect their actions might have on other people and their own posterity. Those times are gone now and the conscience of the world has been buried. If today's leaders don't understand that they are part of a *fabric* rather than an individual agency, they are more free to act in ways to enrich themselves no matter what the consequences. But they *are* part of a fabric. Our world is like the knitted fabric in a nylon

stocking. A disturbance, like a broken thread, causes a run, a chain of consequence.

"The cards give a voice that I can hear to the eternal, interwoven chains of consequence which make up our world. Each spread is a snapshot of cause and effect contained in one person, place and moment."

The upshot of her reading was that I was overwhelmed with the details of my life without any real awareness of its grand pattern. She said I used the language of science to obscure how things made people *feel*. That I use the reality that humans are animals to ignore what makes us human. The reality that all which is born also dies, becomes in my world a tool for ignoring the eternal.

In a back-handed kind of way, she brought up Gretchen. "You think you believe in 'free love' without any *real* understanding of love or freedom."

The reading had smoothly transformed into a real heart to heart talk. For the first time we were communicating the way people in love are *supposed* to communicate. We were different people with different world views and were coming together of our own volition.

The actual words of our conversation are lost to me, but the essential content will be with me forever. I had to give up an *agenda* driven view of our relationship. A view that she was a commodity. She said that she was inspired by my creativity but she had a hard time distinguishing my child-like sense of wonder from just plain immaturity. She promised to treat me like more of an adult. Basically, in that conversation we stopped being sex toys for one another and became real lovers. I called it a clarification. She

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called it a *metaphysical transformation*.

The rest of the evening we spent with each other just talking, laughing..... enjoying each other's company and ignoring everyone else. There would be time for socializing in the morning. This night belonged to us, alone on the empty third floor with a bottle of cheap Bardolino and a little bit of hash.

Our sleeping bags were zipped together in the third floor office that night where we made love. Sweet.....tender....giving while also hard...loud....profoundly orgasmic.

I woke late in the night . Joanie's body was curled up against mine, lush and warm. She woke just enough to gently curse me when I wriggled out of the sleeping bag.

"Bastard," she mumbled before she again drifted off.

Without bothering to pull my jeans on, I made my way to the little and none-too-clean toilet on the other side of the floor. It was quiet.

Only a couple of others had brought their bags up here. The only sound was that of my piss hitting the water. It seemed to echo throughout the whole place, but that may have been an illusion.

When I was walking back, I saw that the moonlight was illuminating the section of wall that I had been contemplating earlier. It looked like the battered surface of some lonely asteroid.

On the sill of a nearby window I found the stub of an old lumber crayon. Naked in the moonlight, like one of the earliest men conjuring his gods, I started to mark on the reinforced concrete of this particular cave's wall. The entire image came to me in a flash and I labored to block the whole thing out with the broken bit of pigment before the vision faded. I could start painting tomorrow, but tonight I had to complete the sketch. At one point I had to go find a ladder to reach high enough, but beside that I was totally focused for over an hour and a half.

When I finally stepped back I gave a little laugh and said aloud, "Me **Adam**.....Adam make *big* magic!"

I made my way back to the office and crawled back into the sleeping bag beside Joanie. When my cold feet touched her naked flesh she twitched and again muttered, "Bastard!" before spooning herself against my back.

I told Joanie about the sketch when we awoke. After she pulled on her dress, she dashed out to see it. She had a sort of vague look on her face when she came back. "Well", she said, "it looks *interesting*."

"Uh-oh." I thought. When I went out to take a look my self, I saw

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what the problem was. The sketch was only the barest outlines. If you didn't know what objects were supposed to be, there was no way to make sense of the drawing. Furthermore, there was a fairly large area which had been X'd out with an arrow pointing to it and the words "not this" printed near it. It looked like the work of a hyperactive six year old.

"Oh....I get it." I said to Joanie. "It'll make a lot more sense when it gets painted in."

"It would have to. There's not much you could do to have it make *less* sense."

"You just wait and see. Lets go get some breakfast."

"Wait and see? You're going to paint all weekend and we aren't going to the Botanical gardens, right?"

"Ummmm....."

"Bastard." She said, but she smiled when she said it.

Downstairs there were pancakes, oatmeal, juice and coffee. There was no milk or cream for the coffee so I had it black. To my surprise, I found I liked it that way.

I sought out Raymack and told him that I had started a painting

on the upstairs wall. He said that he would buy all the paint I needed to complete it when he went out that morning, if I agreed to stay as long as it took to finish it. That was easy because I worked fast. It would be done before the weekend was over.

As good as his word, I would have a pile of pint sized jars of acrylic paint and some brushes before noon.

Howard was eating pancakes with a woman I had never seen before. She was a startlingly pretty sort of Italian looking girl, dark hair, olive skin, deep bosom. He introduced her as Joanne. Her voice was low and very sexy; I was impressed. She was one of the people who had actually moved into this place. When she went off for seconds, Howard confided that they had gotten together because he had semi-facitiously told her that she had the rare chance to sleep with a genius.

"That *worked*?" I was frankly amazed.

"My first words to her were 'fuck me, I'm a genius'."

I nodded my head sagely and smiled. "Well, judging from the results, I'm inclined to agree."

Those who would damn him would say that only Howard would have the intellectual vanity to use a line like that. Those who would praise him would say that only Howard could pull it off.

One thing about Howard was that his appetite for women was almost like a vocation. He was real good about laying on the

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romance thing. Atmospheric dinners with candles and cool jazz on the stereo were his forte. My reaction was that it was a false front, his defense was that;

a. It *worked*. and

b. Whether they said so or not, its what women wanted.

Well, all I can say is that he was quicker on the uptake than I was at the time. In spite of my knowledge of my own behavior, I still generally expected people to say what really felt about things rather than insist that they wanted one thing and really want another. I was kind of a sap that way.

I spent a lot of time under the impression that most of the people I hung out with were *better* than me. That they suffered from the same petty hypocrisys and internal struggles as me must not seem like much of a revelation, but for me, it was a long time coming.

I went looking for Joe, who I had heard had showed up the previous afternoon, but I hadn't seen him. I was informed that he had almost instantly headed off to Jersey with a couple of other folks who wanted to give Raymack a piano for the "village".

Around ten o'clock I heard distant music which was getting louder. A pickup truck pulled up to the open loading dock with Joe sitting at a battered upright piano in the back pounding out Sousa's "Liberty Bell". I jumped down into the bed of the truck and gave him a big hug. "Now that's something completely

different!" I said in a bad English accent.

"He-he. I've been playing all the way from Ridgewood! So, you still being an idiot?"

"Stupidity *is* my chosen lifestyle and old habits *do* die hard, but I think I've learned a thing or two lately."

As if to emphasize my words, Joanie came out at that moment and greeted him with a big hug and a kiss, then snuggled against my shoulder.

"Yep," said Joe, "looks like you're starting to get some smarts."

Me and a bunch of the other guys got a pallet jack (a piece of equipment which came with the building) under the piano, which had lost its casters at some point in its long life, and hauled it off to a corner which Raymack pointed out. Joe was literally *stroking* its ancient crackled varnish like a cherished pet or a lover. It was actually slightly creepy. My guess was that he would not be torn away from it for many hours. As Joanie and I walked off he was playing Zappa's "Peaches en Regalia".

Joanie was doing a dance workshop for some interested people that morning, so she laid a kiss on me and ran off to do it on the

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fourth floor where there was a stereo.

I spent the rest of the morning touching bases with various people until Raymack showed up with a box of paint and brushes for me. From there, the rest of the day was just me and the wall on the second floor.

Painting is a meditation. Yes, its technical and disciplined as well as kind of messy, but for me, it is a meditation.

Over the next few hours. the crayon scribbles were overpainted with the sharp and detailed image of my original vision. Actually, my skills were not up to producing the image exactly as I saw it in my half-dreaming imagination of the previous night, but a pretty reasonable representation of it at least.

A lunar landscape showing an airless, star-filled sky at the horizon. Hanging in that sky is an Earth-like planet, blue, cloud covered and inviting. Standing on the baren surface, oblivious to the lack of atmosphere, facing away from the viewer, is a cave man, naked save for a skirt of some sort of fur. In one hand is a spear and the other holds a dead rabbit. He has paused from returning home from his hunt to gaze up at the shining orb in the sky. In the foreground, a gold pocket watch lays discarded in the dust. There are words on its face instead of numerals. They read in the 12,3,6 and 9 positions, *maybe, no, impossible, yes*, and in the 1,2,4,5,7,8,10,and 11 positions, *forward, in, this time, allways, backward, out, that time and never*. The hands pointed to the words *maybe* and *this time*. The crystal of the watch was cracked. My signature was just the name "Adam" carved into the dusty surface by the finger of some long gone visitor.

Joe wandered by to talk to me. He was one of very few people who I would tolerate being around when I was working. I think it was because he intuitively understood the meditative nature of the process. His presence was actually slightly jarring this time, but only because of the subject of conversation.



"So", he said, "you're not seeing the *chochkey* anymore, eh?"

I laughed. "First of all, please don't murder the Yiddish language with your corn-fed goyish lips. Its *tchochke*, and I never referred to her as that any way and, no, we are no longer an *item*."

"Man, that's good. I *like* Gretchen and all, but people were talking."

"Some people have nothing better to talk about than what my pecker is doing."

"More like they were lining up to be with Joanie if she decided she'd had enough of you. You know, she never said a bad word

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about you, even when people told her all about you and Gretchen."

"Well, like I said before..... I wised up. Spread the word."

Joe filled me in on some of his highway adventures and I told him about my new place in Cambridge. He said he would come up to visit and I knew he would. He never called before coming, he would just *be* there one day.

His general pattern was to show up in a town and have a pretty good job within a day or so and hang around for two weeks or a month and then just as suddenly move on.

We chatted for a bit and he finally went off to look for someone so I was able to fully focus on the wall again.

While I had been painting, various people had passed through to watch and then drifted away when they got the idea that I wasn't into conversation. I barely noticed them in my creation trance. I was being a god, manufacturing my own universe to tell my own story.

Of course, no one got it and I couldn't explain it.

Joanie had an interesting interpretation. "The man in the wilderness...just barely different from other animals.....is he ready to inherit the world? Maybe this time. I like it!"

"Wasn't exactly what I was thinking, but your interpretation is as good as mine."

"Well, maybe its like the cards, you select the symbols, but you need someone else to read them for you."

"Maybe. Even if you're all wrong about that, I couldn't prove it."

"You're *way* too hung up on proving things, Adam! When you paint, it's not your *mind* speaking, its your soul. You don't let your soul speak enough."

"I really was thinking it was just sort of a science fiction illustration."

Joanie sighed deeply and was preparing to go into full lecture mode when we were both distracted by a deep rumbling sound.

Howard and Joanne were coming down the big freight elevator which was completely open at the front and moved so slowly that we found ourselves patiently waiting a full thirty seconds between the time we first saw their feet and them finally bringing the noisy thing to rest. Howard was operating the lever and had to jerk it a few times to bring the car properly into line with the floor. He gave up with the car six inches too high and they both stepped down.

Howard ran over and stared at the painting. After giving it a cursory perusal he said, all in one breath, "You're a fucking *cosmic* genius man! You did that in a day? Its a little *literal* for my taste, of

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course...representational art.... well... its so....you know... predictable... but this is.....wow! You know I tend to favor orderly abstraction....you know, Kandinsky, Malevitch and their ilk, but nonetheless, there is something very...***something*** here! My God! I mean, like *holy shit*, man! Hey look, Raymack wants to make 'stone soup' for dinner, we thought you all might want to go to the market with us and get some stuff to throw in. Man! Raymack will just *flip out* when he sees that picture! Flip out in a good way, I mean. You're a fucking genius! Lets go get some food."

Both women were looking at Howard, presumably in awe of his ability to talk at length without taking a breath. I was used to it, so I tended to forget that it was his special mutant power.

"Where's the market?" I asked.

"None too close, but I have a car," said Joanne whos eyes were still bugging at Howard. It made them look momentarily like brother and sister.

The Friends had a fairly long-standing tradition of making "stone soup".

It was based on the old tale of a hungry soldier passing through a town who's citizens claimed they had nothing to feed him. Seeing that the townspeople had little food and less inclination to share what they had, the soldier announced that he would feed the whole town.

Apparently, before what ever war the story dates from, (the *Swiss and Eskimo* war, claims Howard) this particular soldier was an expert con-man. He proposed to feed the entire population with soup made from a stone. Making a big show of it, and with the eager help of the townspeople, he set up a fire with a huge pot of water in the town square. Placing a only a fist sized rock in the water he announced that they need only boil it for a few hours and they all would eat.

He kept up an animated conversation as he stirred the pot, telling all present how wonderful the soup would be when done. He did, however lament that it could be so much better with only a carrot or two. To no one's surprise, several carrots were turned up from a pantry somewhere in town. In similar fashion, he elicited donations of barley, meat, salt, beans and some of just about everything else the good citizens had claimed not to have, until he was able to present them with the finest soup ever made.

This story served as moral instruction for those who undervalued their connection to their community and to illustrate how to find

plenty when nothing seems available.

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We would do this as a group occasionally because so many of us lived from hand to mouth and to create a strong sense of belonging. We also did it because it was *fun*.

People were supposed to have brought something with them for the pot, but Howard and I had forgotten and the women wanted to get some more, so off we went to the "local" market.

Joanne's car was a massive convertible at least ten years old with large complexly formed tail fins. It was in pretty good shape. Joanne said she loved it because she felt like she was driving a huge tropical fish. It had neither bucket seats nor seat belts. The back seat was as large as my bed back at the rooming house.

The "Shopwell" market was one of the biggest grocery stores I had ever seen. It occupied a shopping center with an equally large

Woolworth's and a big discount shoe store. The parking lot alone was as big as Shea stadium.

There were actually going to be two pots with *meat* to be allowed in one, so I went looking for some ham-hocks, fatback or soup bones. The head butcher was happy to pack up a few bones for me. They came to sixty-nine cents and still had quite a bit of meat on them. When he handed over the package, I noticed that he was missing a couple of joints from two fingers. It reminded me of the guys from the medal factory. I also picked up a few bags of garbanzo beans.

Joanie and Joanne bought barley and rice (brown, of course) and a

bunch of carrots and turnips. Howard, always a master of

sideways thinking, picked up a few pies (on sale ninety-nine cents

each) for dessert. Between us all, we spent about ten bucks and got a bunch of good stuff for the pot as well as the tabloid that Howard insisted on. It had the most unflattering photo of Elvis Presley imaginable on the front page. He looked fat, sweaty and unhealthy. The article claimed that he was on drugs and had become very eccentric. Some of the claims were patently ridiculous, like the one that he watched several tv's at a time and had even put a bullet through the screen of one once. Howard amused us by reading out loud from it on the drive back.

The pots were already boiling when we arrived. Raymack had set them up on a big outdoor brick barbecue he had built just the other side of the loading dock.

The soup making process was still young; one pot just had some rice and celery rolling around in it, the other some chicken necks and potatoes. Each had its own "stone" in the bottom. One was a fair sized cobble but the other had to make do with a cinder block

as real stones were kind of rare in the neighborhood. The pots were really large army-sized aluminum numbers which took two big guys to lift when they were full.

One of the refreshing things about stone soup dinners was that there was no "kitchen ruler". We all cooked together, although in this case the two Johns had taken positions stirring the pots with big wooden spoons and uttering goofy incantations as each person came up to put their contribution in. They also reminded folks which pot was the veggie one.

The soup was wonderful and was served with home baked bread that someone had brought.

One of the interesting things about the stone soup tradition was that most people had brought their own bowls for the purpose and they were all different. Mine was a red and black oriental lacquer ware bowl which my mother found at a Jewish community garage sale. Joanie's was of slightly lumpy ceramic that she had made herself. The two Johns had matching dog dishes that said "John" on them. Dudley preferred an army surplus mess kit. Toadstool's was simple glazed crockery and very large.

It was at this dinner that I first realized that this was one of the biggest gatherings ever. There were over ninety people here, but with the size of the warehouse and the comings and goings, I had not seen everyone together at once.

Only a few of the southerners had made it but their numbers were made up for by a huge bunch from the Chicago area who had

assembled a convoy to bring some fifteen people.

All of the Boston and New York folks were there with a few exceptions. Gretchen was at school and Jason had hitch-hiked to Texas on the spur of the moment. New Jersey and Pennsylvania were well represented and a few scattered people from farther away.

When I looked at this group, I realized that these people were a nation within a nation as much as the Gypsies or the Red Indians were. We had defined ourselves by our customs and our ideals. That we were all of a single generation did not in any way diminish this in my view. I envisioned a future in which we would all still be together, bringing up our children into our own traditions and forging a new society. I believed that this would in fact happen. My vision of my future was an extension of the life that I was currently living.

This was my tribe. These were the people among whom I had

built my identity and who had become my extended family. We had all sat at the same table and broken bread, shared love and tears. I had made my mark on the wall of the clan's cave.

Once in a while a type of person walks out of the wilderness and stands alone in a seemingly lifeless land and looks upon a vision of a beautiful world. "Maybe this time" he thinks, "maybe this time we will reach a new world." He is still a primitive, but he already knows that he's ready.

After we devoured the soup and tossed out the stones, we all put our bowls in the pots and cleaned up everything with a hose out doors.

The stereo was cranked up and people spent the rest of the evening on the first floor just relaxing and making merry.

Joanie spent some time attempting to teach me to dance with little success and much pain to her own feet. She was actually happy when Dudley showed up to bum a smoke off of me and went off to find her less clumsy girl friends to dance with.

Dudley and I sat on the edge of the half raised freight elevator with our legs hanging down looking out over the whole warehouse floor. It was a pretty neat vantage point and when I wanted to show him my painting we just pulled our legs in, manipulated the lever and we were right next to it.

I have to admit that I expected him to dismiss it as bourgeois, but he surprised me with a Marxist interpretation.

"Wow! That's cool. He's a common man who has been left to his own devices in a world who's resources he can't control. He sees

that a better world awaits him if he can only reach it. As long as

he stands alone, he will never reach it. What makes him a primitive is not his use of stone tools, but the fact that his grasp of economics is that of a hunter/gatherer. This really shows that so well..... Hey, you got another weed, man?"

I tossed him another smoke and lit one up myself. "Well, it wasn't really intended as ....."

"No, man", he interrupted, "I understand that it isn't what you meant, but the message is an integral subtext within your original message."

"Yeah, an *integral subtext*. O.K., so what was my original message then?"

"Beats the heck out of me."

I sighed. "You are ever-so-subtle, man."

"That's the truth."

Raymack shouted up the elevator that he was making a beer run.

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I dropped a five down the opening in the floor.

"Get me a six of Miller and a pack of Chesterfields!" I called after the tumbling bank note.

"Better make that two packs," said Dudley.

"Hey!"

"I'll make it up to you!"

"Fuck, man, if you ever pay back every butt you bummed off me, I'd have cancer in a week!"

I hollered down the shaft, "Make that three packs!"

"Got it!", Raymack called back.

So.... I wouldn't get any change, I had a job now.

We went back down to the first floor to see if there was any of that dandy home made bread left.

To my surprise, I saw Wings talking to a couple of people. I admit that, given what had gone down with Eileen and Joanie, I was amazed that he had decided to show up.

His radar pinned me in a second and he came over.

"Adam! Dude, what's happening?"

"Hey, Wings."

"Hey, man, I guess you heard about me and Joanie, huh?"

"Ancient history, man. Don't sweat it."

"I just wanted you to know that I didn't mean for it to happen."

"You didn't?"

"She wouldn't leave me alone, man. She *begged* me." This was too much. *She* begged **him**?? This weasel was getting under my skin. Unfortunately, he didn't stop there. "I knew that there were going to be rumors when she started telling everyone she was my

girlfriend."

I didn't even really care how stuff went down between Joanie and Wings, although, her version of the story made a little more sense than his. What bugged me was his overwhelming lack of taste in bringing it up with me at this point. I guess it was the Devil whispering in my ear that inspired what I said next.

"Those arn't the rumors *I've* been hearing, Wings. I heard the one about you working for the government."

"Huh? What are you talking about?"

"C'mon, man....The National Security Agency? I know all about 'ballast men', y'know? They're supposed to be the guys who are planted in the counter culture to slow it down."

"That's, like, *bizarre*, man. I don't work for the feds." His natural guilt was kicking in. His eyes were shifting to anywhere but my

eyes and his voice wavered ever so slightly. I pounced.

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"Look, man, I know how the government works these kind of things. They get some guy who's a little insecure and makes him feel important. All he has to give them in return is a little information and spread a little discord...really hardly anything at all. They pay him real money and lure him with drugs and the sweet, white flesh of hippie chicks. They usually pick a guy who would normally never get any pussy at all."

"You're fuckin' with my head, man! That is so uncool!"

"Well, its just a rumor."

"Who's been sayin' that shit, man?"

"O.K., look, I don't believe the story, but try to understand. If I tell you, and that person, y'know, *disappears*.....well, its my fault. That would be, like, *woah*....way too heavy! You understand, right? And besides, I would *owe* you for not getting me busted for the acid, right?"

Wings was actually sweating. I realized that I was being a total *schmuck*, but I couldn't help it. "**Look**, man, I don't know who has been sayin' this shit, but its wrong! I'm not a fuckin' spy!"

"Like I said, man.....its not *me* that's sayin' it."

I know that spreading paranoia is just plain nasty, but this clown had it coming. I guess I figured that this would get him to keep his distance once and for all. When he finally wandered off, he was literally twitching.

Raymack came back with the beer about a half hour later and I ended up knocking them back with Toadstool and Dudley while I told them about the conversation with Wings. The general hilarity of his reaction was amazing and got that much better in the

retelling.

Tom said, "You better be careful pal. He might be president some

day! Look at Nixon, *he's* a weasel and he got to be president."

"Hey, all it takes to be president is dumb luck," Said Dudley.

"Look at Ford! He can't even walk without tripping or banging his head on something! Johnson said he couldn't walk and chew gum at the same time! Nobody voted for him, and yet he is president."

He had a point. "Maybe Wings could be president. Maybe he's the only one of us to be naive enough to

*want* to be." I tried to imagine Kevin "Wings" Allen as president of the U.S.A. We had already had worse bets in the Oval office.

We drank up the rest of the beer and did a little reefer as well. I finally wandered off to find my sleeping bag around three am.

Joanie was already deeply asleep when I slipped in beside her. I started kissing my way down her back and she stirred just enough

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to mumble for me to knock it off. I made a pleading sound and pulled a few clever tricks with my fingers and lips and she woke up enough for a quickie.

"Bastard...", she murmured as I slid inside her. She cooed softly as we moved together and almost instantly drifted back off to sleep when we were done.

I had to head back for Boston in the morning, but I felt like I had really *done* something while I had been in New York. I had made a pretty nice painting and my scene with Joanie was much improved.

We parted with promises to get together again within a month and she said that she would like to come with me down to Paul's in November.

Howard and I got a ride to the northern Bronx from Joanne where we picked up a ride all the way to Springfield, Mass. It seemed like we made up for the big jump with a series of rides of only one or two exits all the way to Cambridge.

On Monday I went to work at the mop head factory where I was put to work loading and unloading trucks with a forklift. My control of the contraption was somewhat unsteady. I didn't drive a car so at the end of that first day I was able to say honestly that I had the majority of my experience behind the wheel on that particular machine. Aside from my difficulties piloting the forklift, it was pretty dull work. The factory was a single floor concrete building that was mostly warehouse. The manufacturing end was just two short assembly lines crewed entirely by women who spoke only Portuguese.

One line assembled finished mops, on the other, women with sewing machines created the heads themselves.

This was the first job I had ever had where the entire thing just shut down three times a day, twice for coffee breaks and once for

lunch. Everyone went at once and hung out in the break room. There was virtually no mixing between the assembly crew and the warehouse crew, mostly because of the language barrier.

My co-workers were buffoons, plain and simple. My direct supervisor, Graham, was a high school dropout who was married to a woman whom he had gotten pregnant when he was sixteen. He was an utter sad-sack, who at the age of thirty-three was still working for five dollars an hour and selling canned soda at minor league baseball games on the side. He barely spent any time with his wife and two kids although he



was having an affair with his daughter's best friend who was only seventeen. He won his way into her panties by buying liquor for her and her friends. All in all, a

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pretty *admirable* character.

Vinny, the foreman, was always sniffing me to see if I had been smoking dope on my breaks. I never did, I was too scared of the forklift. That fear proved to be justified around the beginning of my second week there when I backed it off the loading dock dropping it five feet to the driveway with me still on board. I caused about a thousand dollars worth of damage to the fork lift and to the pavement. I was unhurt although I thought Vinnie was going to slug me. Graham laughed his ass off. To my amazement, I was *not* fired. They put me at the dispatch desk filling out bills of lading.

I was only able to deal with this for another week before I just stopped showing up.

Tom was supposed to come up the weekend after New York and bring my bicycle with him, but he backed the Rambler over it before that could happen. He came up anyway and hung out with Sarabeth. I think I only saw him for an hour or so the entire time he was here.

After I quit the factory, I paid up my rent for two months and just relaxed. I had worked out my living arrangements well enough that I could get all the way through to Christmas without having to do more than a little day labor if I didn't mind living mostly on Kraft dinners.

Howard and I ventured out to western Mass. to visit a bunch of religious hippies, a couple of whom had picked us up hitch-hiking. We were made to feel very welcome, particularly by the many pretty women who seemed ever-present, but the general feeling of the place was a little weird. They all drove identical Honda Civics

which they had bought in bulk and they all had guns because they thought the government was out to get them. Their charismatic leader who went only by the name "Raphael" spent a lot of time

talking about the coming judgment. A few years after we visited them, we heard that the lot of them were arrested in connection with an unsuccessful plan to blow up an armory.

Another time we got picked up by three rowdy teens who were headed for trouble. Howard was in the front seat drinking cinnamon/apple flavored wine with the driver and I heard the conversation.

"D'you think we show him?"

"Show me what?" said Howard.

Next thing I heard was Howard going "Woah! Show my friend!"

and I suddenly found myself staring down the twin barrels of a sawed off shotgun. The guy sitting beside me in the back seat

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smacked his hand aside and said, "Be careful! That thing's loaded!"

That I didn't shit my pants in that moment is a minor miracle and I am filled with pride over the heroic fortitude of my sphincter.

Adventures like these were part of a habit that Howard and I had of just following up any interesting proposition that was ever presented to us. Not all of them were such good ideas.

At the end of the month I went back to Staten Island to do finishing work on the painting at Raymack's. It had been joined by several others as Raymack had gotten his wall painting program rolling. The second floor of the converted warehouse was becoming a true art gallery.

While I was down there I visited Joanie and we spent a nice week end together.

It was all arrival and departure for me as I hurtled ahead in time. It was only the turning of the seasons that indicated that time was passing at all. For me, one day blended into another. Neither time nor place were measurable constants. When I was again headed for Birmingham, it seemed like no time at all had passed since the last time I had been on that road with Joe.

I was by myself this time although Tom was coming down a week later and bringing Joanie and Sarabeth with him.

Honestly, I enjoyed traveling on my own. I was a slave to the romance of the road. The web work of the highway system was a reflection of the pathways of my own mind. The place I was, was the same as the thoughts I was thinking and so I felt it would be for all time. I was living in the viewpoint of eternity. I was a center of time and space. The question of where I would be tomorrow had

no meaning outside of the context of where I was now. It was in this phase of my life that I came closest to enlightenment, where I was both point and line at the same time. I was where I was and where I was, was no place in particular and no place in particular felt like it was only a step away from everywhere at once.

I stood on the West Virginia road with the setting sun at my back as a car pulled over ahead of me. The driver called out to me "I'm only goin' a couple of exits. I turn off at Hutsanger."

I hesitated only a second. " That's o.k., man, I'll wait for someone going farther, but thanks for stopping anyhow!"

He drove off. There would be other rides. There was always another ride coming around the bend. One of them was mine.

## **And Then What Happened?**

In the years that have intervened between then and now, much has happened. The details of those years are both tragic and joyous. Both adventurous and mundane.

I have lived, since then a length of time equal to the total years I had lived at the time of the events portrayed here. My personality and way of seeing the world has evolved in mostly unexpected ways. There are many things that I dreamed but never did and there are many things I have done that I never dreamed of.

Over the years, the number of people from those days that I have stayed in touch with has dwindled. Some have become lost to me from distance in space, some from distance in philosophy and some are separated from me by that gulf which separates the living from the dead.

Most of us remained obscure, but at least one of us became a household name. That was, of course, Wings, who, as "Dink" Allen is the host of the popular show "World's Stupidest Video Bloopers".

Joanie and I finally drifted apart as she became more and more of a "New Age" cultist. She is now an aroma therapist in Encino, California. I hope she has had children, because she had the makings of a great mother.

Jason was killed in the mid 80's having been hit by a truck while hitch-hiking. No drama. It was swift and meaningless.

Joe, like many of the Friends, vanished into the northwest where, last I heard, he was living in a tree house with a wife and four kids.

Howard became a well respected music scholar who writes popular articles for Sunday supplements.

I hear that the two Johns still live together somewhere in Pennsylvania. Neither have ever married in spite of the fact that they seem to like women. Apparently they are reluctant to change their lifestyle.

Dudley, after spending a decade studying physics suddenly gave up politics and started following an Indian guru while he took up the importing business.

I hear Gretchen eventually married a dentist and settled in Wilmington, Delaware, where she is active in the Unitarian church and the PTA. She inherited the Sugar business in the late eighties only to have it swindled out of her hands by unscrupulous lawyers. She is involved in an ongoing litigation with them.

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Tom is a carpenter and a Methodist lay preacher.

Brad went back to the robot factory where he remains to this day.

And then there is me. What became of Adam?

I stayed and settled in Cambridge although I continued to travel for several years until the inevitable happened and I got married to a woman who moved into the apartment next door to me. Running into her on the way to empty my trash for some reason led to romance. The marriage lasted five years and then one day just wasn't there anymore. We didn't hate each other or anything, we were just unsuccessful at overcoming our personal boundaries enough to gain real intimacy and our personal egos enough to be a

real team. We are still quite good friends. I came out of it a very changed man and finally really devoted myself to my art, although how that art was expressed seemed to change from year to year. First I was a painter, next a collagist, then a musician, then a cartoonist, painter again and then writer. I ignored the years as they paced away to wherever years go. My sense of who I was had come to depend more and more on what I had done. Whatever I did drew modestly respectable notice, but never enough to allow me to "quit my day job" as they say. I achieved a certain type of happiness, but not by a road that I might have expected to take. My life has involved so much more compromise than I had wanted and yet so much less than those of so many other people. I have nothing to complain about, save for the same thing that everyone has to complain about, that being that the world is not constructed to suit our personal visions. Oh well, I have become content in constructing my own personal visions.

Over the years, I have thought about Joanie's metaphore about being adrift. It wasn't bad, but for me another vision works a little better.

When I have stood on the side of a road with my thumb out, I have allways thought that I knew where I was going, but the trip itself has provided what the trip is really about. Each ride I get tells me something new about the world. Each ride I have turned down, an oportunity missed or a disaster avoided. Being on the road is being in the world, seeing it in motion, seeing humans involved in going. The road that recedes behind is never so important as the road which unfolds ahead, but both must be there because time is incomplete without both past and future. To put it more simply, we are all both point and line at the same time, and it is the line which is made up of all points. We can't forget the past because its events illuminate the present and point the way toward the future, but

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there is no sense in trying to make a home there any more than it is useful for an electron to stop on the wire. The whole thing that makes life work is that we move *through* it. Life isn't the place where we live, its the road that we travel.

It doesn't seem like much of a lesson, but that's the thing about

what life has to offer in the way of wisdom. Most of the lessons we learn are pretty simple and if we took the time to think about them for a moment or two, we could save ourselves a lot of trouble. But then, saving ourselves trouble isn't what its about.

I'm not hoping to sum up my life here, I can't even hope to sum up the small portion portrayed here which now lies some twenty years behind me because its influence is still with me and still has things to teach me. I can only hope that by examining it in the light of subsequent experience I can come to understand what I have learned and what I may yet learn from it a little better.

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